132 PAGES OF THE BEST COMICS FEATURES, INTERVIEWS & REVIEWS

COMIC HEROES

CS FOR EVERYONE

DR STRANGE
THE ORIGINS OF THE SORCERER SUPREME

DC'S X-MEN?
THE WEIRD HISTORY OF DOOM PATROL

Wonder Woman

GREG RUCKA ON DC REBIRTH & 75 YEARS OF THE AMAZING AMAZON

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COMICS FOR EVERYONE

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Courtesy of DC Comics

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WELCOME!

EDITOR'S PHOTO © 2015 KEVIN LOWE

My home town wasn't exactly overflowing with comic shops – in fact, there were none. I could get *2000 AD*, of course, but until my mate Kev opened up the short-lived and much missed Cobalt Comics, I had to rely on a mysterious rack in the newsagent for US titles. Comics (usually DC) would drift in and out, seemingly at random. There was a smattering of superhero titles, but mostly it was a grab-bag of Vertigo issues: one month you'd find *Seekers Into The Mystery*, the next *Preacher*, with little chance of collecting a full set. But one title came in with weird regularity – Grant Morrison and Rachel Pollack's runs on *Doom Patrol*. Picking it up for the first time, I had no idea what I was about to get myself into... I'm still very fond of that team, so it's great to be able to dedicate a good chunk of this issue to them, alongside the likes of Wonder Woman, Doctor Strange, plus exciting new projects like *Also Known As*. Plus, we have the final instalment of Mike Garley's Creating Indie Comics, reviews, news and more. Thanks for reading. See you back here on 10 January in space year 2017 when surely we'll all finally have those jetpacks we were promised.

Will

Will Salmon, Editor

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HEAT VISION

THE HOTTEST NEWS FROM THE COMICS WORLD

BACK TO THE '70S

Rebellion's purchase of the Fleetway and IPC Youth Group comics archive will see the return of many classic comics to print, reports **Stephen Jewell**...

Rebellion plans to resurrect the childhood favourites of many British comics fans after acquiring the Fleetway and the IPC Youth Group archives from previous owners Egmont Publishing.

Home to *2000 AD*, the Oxford-based company has now added many of the Galaxy's Greatest Comic's 1970s stablemates to its repertoire, most notably *Battle*, *Action* and famous football comic, *Roy of the Rovers*.

"We're delighted to have the archive," says Ben Smith, Rebellion's Head of Books and Comics Books. "After licensing the *Monster* and *Misty* collections from Egmont, we were in a position to have a discussion with them about their complete backlist, and we found that they were open to an offer on the material, especially since they knew that we represented a home that would curate and manage the archive with the specialism and careful execution we brought to the *2000 AD* and *Judge Dredd Megazine* backlists."

The Alan Moore/John Wagner and Alan Grant-written *Monster* was originally published in the pages of short-lived 1984 horror weekly *Scream!*. Last month's inaugural *Misty* collection, meanwhile, combined two of the most popular strips from the much-loved supernatural title: Pat Mills and John Armstrong's *Moonchild* and *The*

War, what is it good for? Great comics, obvs.

An infamous cover for an infamous comic.

Scream! kept many a young reader awake at night

Four Faces Of Eve by Malcolm Shaw and Brian Delaney. With both books faring well and *Misty* especially attracting a lot of attention from new readers, Smith admits that their release proved to be a dry run for purchasing the remainder of IPC's varied library.

ECLECTIC RANGE

"Initially we went after *Monster* because Keith Richardson, our graphic novels editor, was a big *Scream!* fan, and he pitched it as a missing Moore/Wagner/Grant book," Smith says of the series, which was drawn by Heinzl and Jesus Redondo. "With that pedigree, we would have been crazy not to try and make it happen. With *Misty*, it arose initially because of Pat Mills's vociferous bigging up of the comic and as we looked at our forthcoming graphic novel schedules, we realized that we had the scope to increase the number of non-*2000 AD* generated books we released. If we could do so by capitalising on work by creators who are well known for their *2000 AD* material, it made perfect sense. That began our research into the IPC girls comics, which has revealed to us that there are huge numbers of untapped strips waiting to be rediscovered."

Rebellion has so far declined to detail what titles and properties they have purchased. However, on the Downthetubes.net website, John Freeman suggests that apart from adventure titles like *Action*, *Battle*, *Scream!*, *Jet* and *Thunder*, it may also include humour comics like *Whoopee*, *Whizzer And Chips* and *Buster* as well as the sports-themed *Scorcher* and weeklies such as *Jinty* and *Tammy*.

Describing it as "an ongoing project," Smith won't be drawn on how Rebellion will balance reprinting classic stories with commissioning new series centring around the old characters, as Titan Comics recently did with *Johnny Red* and December's *Hookjaw*, who originally appeared in *Battle* and *Action* respectively.

"We have a lot of ambitions, but we're in the early stages of planning how to best develop the archive," says Smith, who acknowledges that it ties in with an increase in *2000 AD*'s early material, which has recently seen the long awaited return to print of its Dan Dare stories as well as the publication of former editor Steve McManus's memoir, *The Mighty One!*.

"People would have been interested in this material, no matter when it came out. The excitement around it now is really due to simply putting amazing stories out there that people have not been able to get their hands on for decades." CH

SHARK ATTACK

Si Spurrier and **Conor Boyle** sink their teeth into a new series of Hookjaw for Titan...

After taking to the skies for Garth Ennis and Keith Burns revival of *Battle*'s World War Two flying ace *Johnny Red*, Titan Comics will be scouring the seas for their next project from IPC's plentiful comics vault. Having first appeared in the pages of *Action* in 1976, ferocious ocean predator *Hookjaw* is being propelled headlong into the 21st Century in a new five-issue miniseries by Si Spurrier and Conor Boyle.

And while Spurrier claims to have "wanted to do a *Hookjaw* story for as long as I've been making comics," Boyle admits that he is old enough to have read the original stories by co-creator Pat Mills, writer Ken Armstrong and artist Roman Sola. "Well, I remember the *Action* annuals at least," he laughs. "My cousin Chris was a brilliant artist, who used to read mountains of subversive comics like *Mad*, *2000 AD* and *Action*, and he enjoyed passing them on to my sister and I, full in the knowledge that we were way too young for them."

Hookjaw was initially intended to be *Action*'s answer to *Jaws* but with more heart – not to mention bucket-loads of blood. "My dad had read [Peter Benchley's] book, and so decided that I could watch the film up until Hooper went into the cage – and the music starts," recalls Boyle. "I then had to go to bed, so of course, my dreams had to make up the ending, which turned out to be far worse than the real final act. I've been chasing that representation of pure horror and realism in my artwork ever since, so *Hookjaw* has been a nice coming full-circle moment on that front."

While Boyle cryptically hints that, "a percentage of the story might be set at sea," Spurrier has revealed that the story involves *Hookjaw* "arriving like a shadow amidst a catalogue of zoologists, soldiers, spies and Somali pirates".

And rather than "the naff tentacled hybrids and shrieking starlets of modern B-movie shark fiction," Spurrier script instead relies on "the far more fascinating facts emerging from modern research into the great white shark". All of which requires a certain verisimilitude from Boyle. "I'm still drawing the series, so I've had a constant stream of National Geographic documentaries about sharks on the go." CH

Hookjaw #1 is published by Titan Comics on December 14.

Right: A man getting munched in half by a massive shark? Yep, that's *Hookjaw*.

SI SPURRIER • CONOR BOYLE • GIULIA BRUSCO • ROB STEEN
HOOKJAW
TITAN
SI SPURRIER • CONOR BOYLE • GIULIA BRUSCO • ROB STEEN
HOOKJAW
TITAN

> "I'VE WANTED TO DO HOOKJAW AS LONG AS I'VE BEEN IN COMICS"

THE LOGOS OF WAR

Douglas Rushkoff on pitting Aleister Crowley against Adolf Hitler...

Sometimes truth really is stranger than fiction. Centring around notorious English magician Aleister Crowley during the Second World War, Douglas Rushkoff's new graphic novel *Aleister and Adolf* seems pretty fantastical. The New York-based author insists, however, that much of it is based on actual historical events.

"History did the weaving for me," says Rushkoff, who also incorporates important figures such as James Bond creator Ian Fleming into his narrative. "Crowley did indeed work with Ian Fleming to deliver anti-Hitler sigils to Winston Churchill, and Churchill's famous 'V is for Victory' salute was a sigil direct from Crowley, which was designed to offset the power of Hitler's swastika."

Rushkoff also cites the example of General Patton, who was responsible for retrieving the so-called Spear of Destiny – the weapon that supposedly killed Christ on the cross, which Hitler had claimed after invading Austria in 1938. "The thing I enjoyed was moving my own plot forward, and then finding another piece of history that just fell into my lap," continues Rushkoff. "Like the kidnapping and questioning of Rudolf Hess on mescaline. I mean, you can't make this stuff up!"

Known for his novels *Ecstasy Club* and *Exit Strategy* and comics like Vertigo's *Testament* as well as media theory books like *Cyberia* and *Present Shock*, Rushkoff tells the story from the perspective of a young web developer in 1995, looking back on what happened in the past.

"I wanted to show how innocent we were at the beginning of the internet," he explains. "We were unaware of how powerful these brands were when we permitted them to migrate online. I wanted to show the real roots of advertising, of corporate logos, and the media environment in which we live. We don't realise that we are living inside a space not just inhabited by corporate entities, but defined by it. Those entities are sustained by black magic. Not just metaphorically, the real thing, as kids have died to make your cellphone."

Above and below: Covers for *Peepland* #2 by (top to bottom) Chris Wahl, Will Conrad and Alex Shibao.

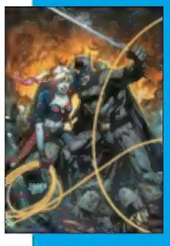
Right: *Triggerman* covers by Steve Scott (top) and Dennis Calero.

Aleister and Adolf went through a succession of artists, but *Cave Carson Has A Cybernetic Eye*'s Michael Avon Oeming agreed to take on the art. "He seemed to have an intuition for how far to let these memes penetrate his psyche, without losing his own centre," says Rushkoff, who believes that the book wouldn't have benefited from full colour. "It's black and white because none of us could see it any other way. It was a black and white world, at least as it was remembered by media." CH

***Aleister and Adolf* is published by Dark Horse Comics on 2 November.**

IN THE FRAME

WE USED TO CALL THESE THINGS "NIBS", YOU KNOW?



JLA VS SS

DC has revealed it's first Rebirth era crossover: *Justice League Vs. Suicide Squad*. The six-issue, weekly event starts in December, and there will be a prelude in *Suicide Squad* #8.

ONE LEAGUE LEFT

Alan Moore has stated that he has one final volume of *League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen* planned before he is "done with comics". While that sounds pretty final, Moore still has several other comics projects, including *Cinema Purgatorio* to complete. Don't go, Alan!

BISHOP GOES SOLO

Kate Bishop – aka the other Hawkeye – is finally getting her own solo book. Penned by *Jem And The Holograms*' Kelly Thompson and drawn by Leonardo Romero, the team let fly (like an arrow... oh, never mind) in December.

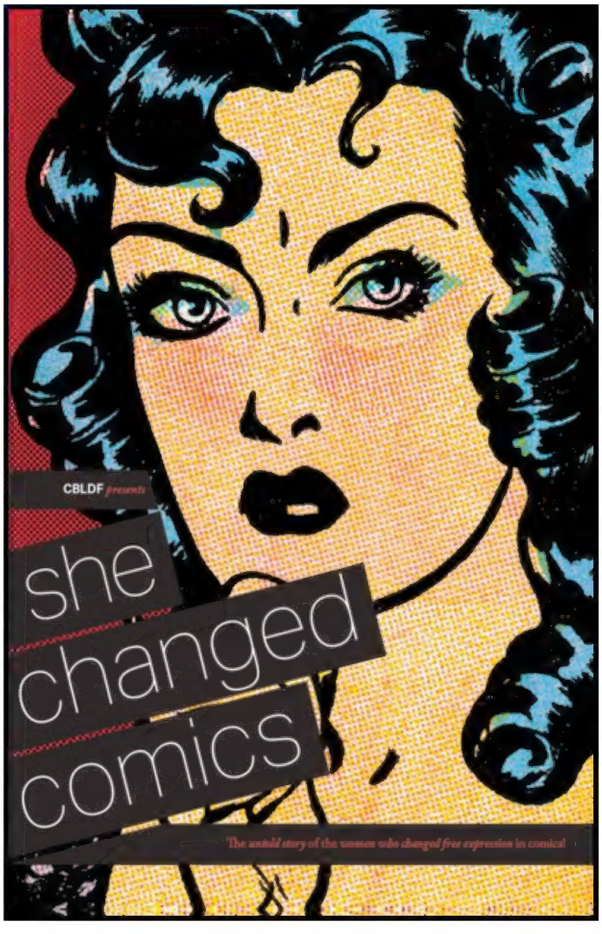
SLICK PRICK

Riverdale's prime arsehole gets his own title this December. *Reggie & Me* comes from Tom DeFalco, Sandy Jarrell, Kelly Fitzpatrick, and Jack Morelli and focusses on Archie Andrew's nemesis and his dog Vader in the New Riverdale continuity.

IMAGES COURTESY OF TITAN, DARK HORSE.

WONDER WOMEN

Claire Lim talks to the editor of a new book about groundbreaking female comics creators



There's an underground movement of female comics artists and writers that has gone unsung for decades. These women changed the landscape of the comics scene and a new book, *She Changed Comics*, documents how their groundbreaking work has permeated into the mainstream.

The 160-page book began life as a Kickstarter project by the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund earlier this year and within a mere eight hours it had already reached its target. It profiles more than 60 women who have changed the landscape of free expression in comics and features interviews with women working in the industry today.

Golden Age cartoonist Jackie Ormes is featured – she was the first black woman to make a living as a cartoonist. Then there's underground artist Diane Noomin, whose character DiDi Glitz broke new ground by highlighting transgressive social issues.

Although it feels like we've come a long way with female readership on the up and more women being represented in comics (on and off the page), Editorial Director of the CBLDF and Editor of *She Changed Comics* Betsy Gomez believes there's much more to be done. "Comics by women are disproportionately targeted by censors," says Gomez. "Since 2011, eight comics have made the American Library Association's annual '10 most challenged books' list. Of those, six feature female central characters and four were created or co-created by women. There's little evidence that gender was a factor in the challenges (although the depiction of female sexuality does tend to make some people uncomfortable), but women are still underrepresented in the industry, both in terms of creators and characters, so this data does raise concerns that women's expression is being suppressed."

Women are still being censored and even imprisoned for their work like Iranian artist and political activist Atena Farghadani, who was jailed for 18 months over her controversial cartoon highlighting an Iranian draft law, depicting government officials as monkeys and goats. This law would outlaw voluntary sterilisation and limit access to measures of birth control.

Betsy Gomez and the CBLDF hope that the book will act as an educational tool but, thanks to the success of the Kickstarter campaign, it has become much more than that. The campaign raised an incredible $66,741 (the original goal was a humble $10,000). Gomez comments, "It's given us an opportunity to develop a programme of resources around the book, including teaching guides and digital resources for educators, that would have been more difficult to provide via a traditional publisher." CH

She Changed Comics will be published by Image on 5 October.

Right: Readers of *She Changed Comics* might know Noelle Stevenson's Eisner award winning *Lumberjanes* but will certainly discover creators they're less familiar with in the pages of the eye-opening book.

> "WOMEN ARE STILL UNDERREPRESENTED IN THE INDUSTRY"

BREAKING THE LAW

Stephen Jewell investigates Titan's new crime line, Hard Case Crime.

It seems like crime really does pay for Titan. After publishing novels like Stephen King's *Joyland* through its Hard Case Crime imprint, the publisher is establishing a companion series of comic books, curated by author and Hard Case Crime co-founder Charles Ardai.

"I've been a comics fan at least as long as I've been reading mystery novels, so finding a way to merge the two is really a natural for me," says Ardai, who previously helmed sci-fi anthology *Orbit* for Eclipse Comics in the '90s. "I'd never done a crime comic and it felt like the time was right."

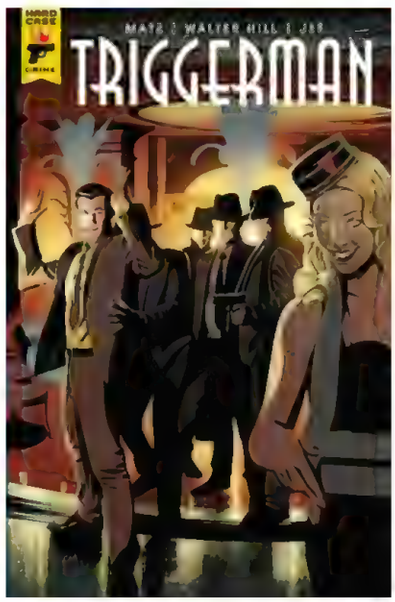
Debuting this month, Hard Case Crime will first offer up the double-barrelled salvo of *Triggerman*, by *48 Hours/The Warriors* director Walter Hill and the French writing and art team of Matz and Jef, and *Peepland* by *Money Shot* author Christa Faust, co-writer Gary Phillips and artist Andrea Camerini.

"When the time came to launch the comics imprint, I knew that I wanted Christa to do a book for it, and she brought Gary in as her co-pilot," says Ardai. "The story is semi-autobiographical – it takes place in the 1980s and is based on the time Christa spent working as a peepshow girl in Times Square. *Peepland* is set in that world, and follows a group of peepshow workers who get entangled in a brutal crime and its repercussions."

Set during the 1930s Prohibition era, *Triggerman* is based on an unmade screenplay by Walter Hill, which Matz and Jef have subsequently turned into a graphic novel. "It's the story of a hired gun, who is sprung from prison by the Mob and sent to punish a couple of thieves who stole a million dollars of Mob money," explains Ardai. "But the gunman has a slightly different agenda, since he is looking for the girl he lost when he went to jail, who happens to now be in the clutches of the thieves."

Above and below: Covers for *Peepland* #2 by (top to bottom) Chris Wahl, Wil Conrad and Alex Shibao

Right: *Triggerman* covers by Steve Scott (top) and Dennis Calero

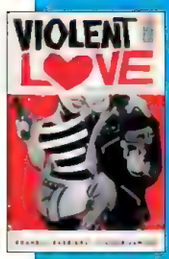


Along with books by Megan Abbott, Alison Gaylin and Duane Swierczynski, 2017 will see *Road to Perdition* author Max Allan Collins' Quarry series making the transition from prose to comic books. "We've published all the Quarry novels so far, so now we're doing the comic, for which Max is writing a brand new story," says Ardai, who is also working on a series himself: "It's about a female weapons expert, who finds herself in hot water when a gun she smuggles into a high-security prison is used to break someone out who then sets in motion a scheme to... But I've said too much! So I'm going to zip my lip before a couple of big guys in fedoras show up to zip it for me!" CH

***Triggerman* is on sale 9 November; *Peepland* follows on 23 November.**

IN THE FRAME

NIBS STANDS FOR "NEWS IN BRIEF" BY THE WAY. HI MUM



CRIME COUPLE

CLASSICS BACK

TOP CAT

MONSTER INVASION

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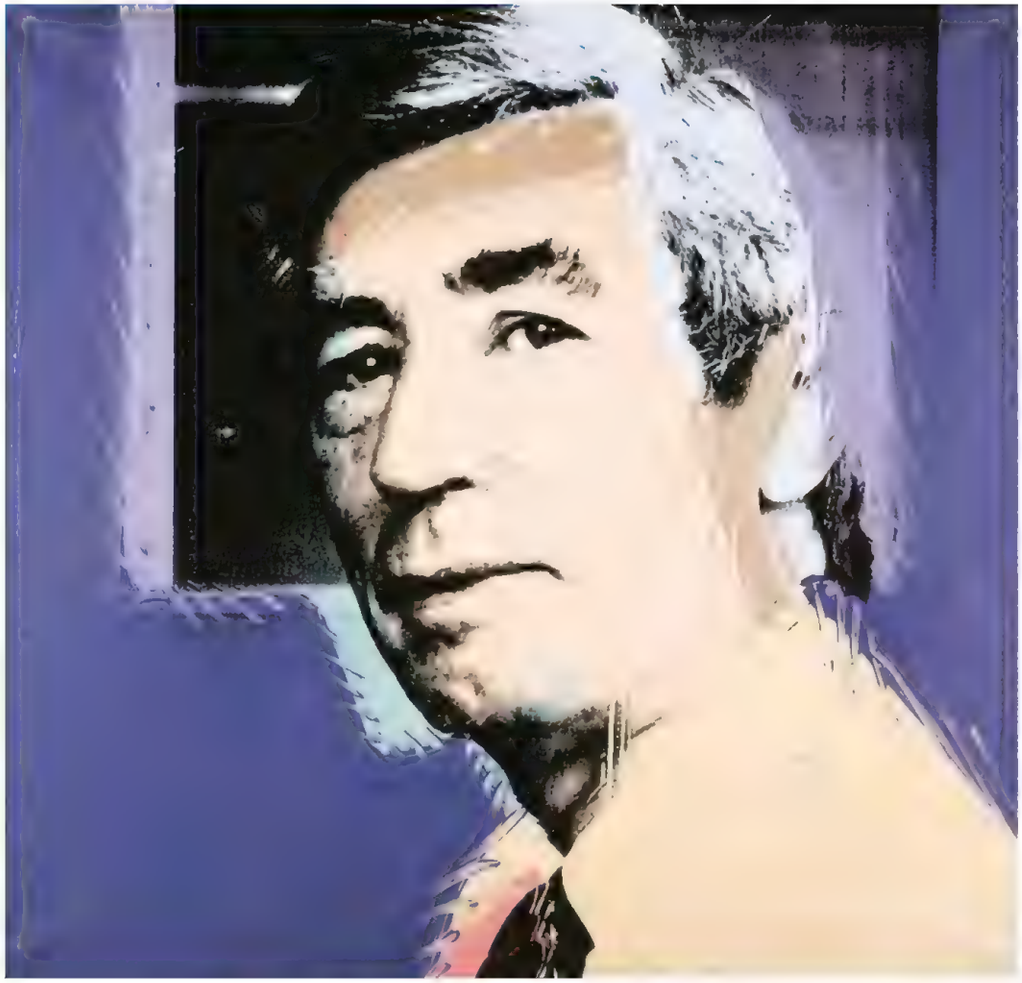

HERGÉ IS AT THE GRAND PALAIS, PARIS, TILL 15 JANUARY 2017. ADMISSION €13, €9 CONCESSIONS, FREE FOR UNDER-16s, THOSE CLAIMING BENEFITS AND OAPs.

HERGÉ IN PARIS

For the first time, the Grand Palais in Paris is honouring a comics creator, none other than the inventor of Tintin. **Paul Gravett** finds out more...

On 10 January 1929, Hergé (real name Georges Remi, 1907-83), introduced his boy reporter Tintin. Today, 33 years after their Belgian creator's death, Tintin's 24 adventures remain bestsellers in over 70 languages. In collaboration with the Musée Hergé outside Brussels, the most extensive Hergé retrospective ever has opened in Paris. It presents his original drawings, the paintings he collected and those he painted himself, and rare artefacts and photographs, to evoke the encounters that guided his life and artistic vision. *Comic Heroes* spoke to exhibition co-curator Jérôme Neutres and Grand Palais' advisor Cécile Maisonneuve to find out more...

Comic Heroes: What makes Hergé's work so unique?
Jérôme Neutres: Its remarkable universality. How many artists have succeeded in producing works which touch people from the age of 7 to 77, starting with Belgians in 1929 to Americans in 2016? I'll never forget my surprise at the Calcutta Book Fair seeing people so interested in the Bengali versions of the Tintin books. Also it's the graphic genius of Hergé, the famous "Clear Line" [style]. It's this simplicity which makes his work universal.

Above: Hergé's famous creation has sold an estimated 250 million books worldwide since the first album was published in 1930

CH: What will visitors discover in this exhibition?
JN: We are showing the most artworks and related items on Hergé ever presented, so that visitors can immerse themselves in his imagination. They can step inside the Hergé Studios to explore how his famous albums were created. We look at his influences (especially from film), his relationship with contemporary art (because like any great artist, Hergé is part of art history), his creative stages (such as modelling objects or buildings to colouring), and the different media he tried (designing advertisements, drawing and abstract painting).

"HERGÉ IS MUCH MORE THAN A COMICS AUTHOR, HE IS A GREAT MASTER OF ART"

CH: Which item in the exhibition is for you the most revealing?
Cécile Maisonneuve: Difficult to pick one over another! If I am forced to choose, I would go for his pencil drawings, because they make you realise how Hergé's apparently simple "Clear Line" is actually not at all straightforward and instantaneous. To arrive at the "right" line, the one that sums up everything by expressing in a single stroke the situation, motion and emotion, requires a long process of graphic research, a multitude of preliminary sketches in which lines intertwine and overlap. Even if the first album, *Tintin In The Land Of The Soviets*, is not in my opinion the best of Hergé, I would be tempted to select a small drawing from it, because it may be the best example in the exhibition of that defining moment in Hergé's drawing process.

CH: What does Hergé's last, unfinished, album, *Tintin And Alph-Art*, reveal about his attitudes to contemporary art?
CM: It reveals a certain ambivalence on his part. There's a fascination for contemporary art, which Hergé had been collecting since the 1960s. But there's also plenty of bite in how he depicts this small world and its slightly troubled personalities. It's a caricature that is actually not so outrageous – the current scandal tarnishing the Paris art market has something Tintin-esque about it. In this far-sighted album, Hergé asks the essential question about Art with a capital A – whether it is true or false.

Above: From initial sketches to colour roughs to finished ink art, Hergé put a lot of thought and effort into his deceptively simple-looking art

CH: Why has it taken some time for comics artists to be included in French art museums?
JN: For too long, France's main museums were confined by too narrow a definition of "fine art" and especially that Holy Trinity of painting, sculpture and religious art. But over the past decade or more, the idea has taken hold that no one art form is superior to another, and through their outstanding artists all have their place in national museums. For example, in 2012 the Louvre showed Enki Bilal, and now Hergé is being exhibited by the Grand Palais. Comics has its great artists who go further and transcend their medium. Hergé is much more than a comics author, he is first and foremost a great master of art. CH

RMN-GRAND PALAIS / PHOTO PAUL NEMERLIN, HERGÉ © ADAGP, PARIS, © HERGÉ-MOULINSART 2016

ABOUT LEAH
Leah Moore is a writer of comics, prose and journalism, as well as the co-founder of the revolutionary *Electricomics*. She nas written for *Albion*, *Wild Girls*, *Tom Strong* and more. Follow ner on Twitter at **@leahmoore**.

Comics in the blood

I'm sat looking at a drawing I did when my twins were two years old and my eldest was nearly five. I spent a large amount of my time then physically covered in children. I would have all three of them jammed onto my lap to watch TV or read a book, and invariably they would begin to fight and scramble about and destroy the room, pull the couch cushions off and leave me a dishevelled mess trying to control their behaviour and stop the room from being reduced to rubble.

I drew a cartoon of this, with no detail spared of all the toys, nappies, spilt drinks, suspect stains and naked terror on my face. Sharing it on Facebook, I had comments from everyone I knew saying it was their house, it was their life, they remembered that stage, it had made them smile, it too would pass, and keep my chin up. It communicated directly the humour and abject horror of that exact time.

I also have somewhere a comic I drew in biro on a piece of lined paper, 15 years ago in university. I was living with my boyfriend of the time, and I was manifestly not happy. It shows me in bed, a tuft of scraggly hair sticking out from the duvet, a clock radio on the nightstand, and we see, over six panels, how many times I hit snooze, how totally unwilling I was to get out of bed. When I do get up I'm slouched, unkempt and almost unrecognisable as a 23-year-old woman. I look like Roald Dahl's Mrs Twit. It's a totally banal slice of life, but something compelled me to capture the awfulness of it.

Recently, my mum told me she used to draw her own comics, when me and my sister were very little. She said she had thrown most of them away as they were "too miserable", but then the next week she brought one round. In it, she despairs at the state of the house, covered as it is in toys, stains, small socks, small children and all the attendant filth that comes with them. Heroically she leaps into action to clean and paint the house. She shows my sister asking for a million things as she tries to paint, and my dad sat at his typewriter terrified of stopping work to help because then he would not be earning any money. By the end she has a nice clean painted house, but somehow she still feels bad. Six panels telling exactly how it is to be a parent of small children, and try to keep body and soul together, with an insecure income. I could have drawn it myself today.

I was floored by her comic, because it meant my own comics had an unknown precedent. Looking at it with all the details, and the wonderful expressions, I can read every feeling she had on that day.

I love diary comics for this reason, especially where parents talk about their kids – doodlemum.com is a favourite, as it's so beautifully drawn, but hurrahforgin.com *SLAYS* me with its accuracy, and that has stick figures for drawings.

I love that I got my impulse to record my life from my mum, and I didn't even know it. I love that she was making comics just to get that stuff out of her head, exactly how I do. I wish that she could've had a diary comic blog, or its 1982 equivalent, so we had a record of her days, and her frustrations, and the things that made her laugh. Maybe I should ask her to start one now.

"I was floored by her comic. I can read every feeling she had on that day."

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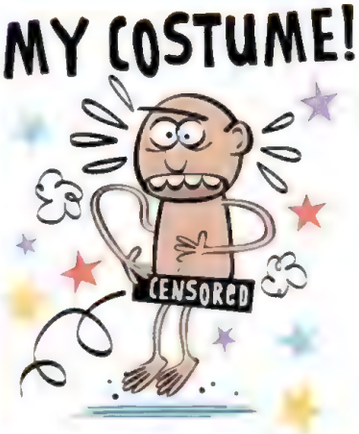
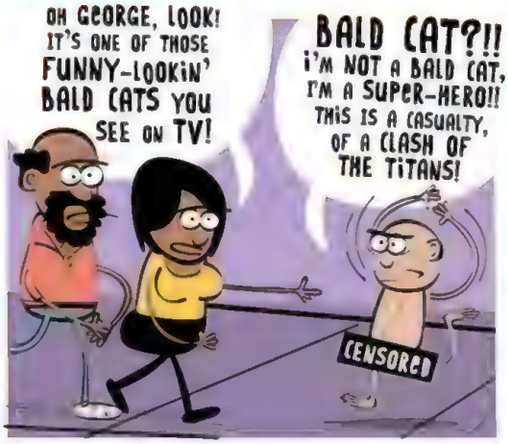
A COMIC BY MARC JACKSON

ME? I'M BIG CITY'S ONE AND ONLY SUPER-HERO, THAT'S WHO!... WELL, APART FROM MY GRANDMA WAFFLE, BUT SHE CAN'T TAKE THE CRAZY PACE OF ADVENTURE!




OH GEORGE, LOOK! IT'S ONE OF THOSE FUNNY-LOOKIN' BALD CATS YOU SEE ON TV!
BALD CAT?!! I'M NOT A BALD CAT, I'M A SUPER-HERO!! THIS IS A CASUALTY, OF A CLASH OF THE TITANS!
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Monika: Masked Ball

Monika is searching for her missing sister, and finds herself in a shadowy and seductive underworld. As her quest continues, she discovers that her sister is not only connected to a mysterious organisation – she may actually control it.

Masked Ball is the first of two volumes from novelist and clinical psychologist Thilde Barboni, with art by Guillem March (*Penny Dreadful*), published by Titan Comics. It's a slim read at just 56 pages, but we think you'll agree that March's artwork is pretty special, and this looks like an intriguing, adults-only comic.

© DUPUIS, BARBONI, MARCH

SHAPERS OF WORLDS

RAPID-FIRE Q&As WITH COMIC CREATORS

TAZIO BETTIN AND ENRICA EREN ANGIOLINI

In the grim darkness of the far future there is only war! And comics, of course... **Will Salmon** talks to the artists behind Titan's new Warhammer 40,000 line.

Comic Heroes: What made this an appealing project?

Tazio Bettin: I was offered the job by my editor Andrew James of Titan after he saw my pages for Titan's *Independence Day*. He seemed impressed by the quality and the speed of my work, and told me he wanted me to work on a series. When he said it was Warhammer 40,000, I jumped with joy. It was also the start of a great journey. I'm now working with a wonderful team, together with Enrica, my art partner, a great writer, George [Mann], and Andrew, who is the most encouraging editor I have ever worked with.

Enrica Eren Angiolini: I owe my involvement to Tazio. We've been working together for more than a year on both comics and illustration projects. When Titan offered him the job he contacted me to know if I wanted to join him.

CH: Are either of you miniature painters/gamers yourselves?

TB: I have been for quite some time. I've gathered quite a diverse collection, from Space Marines to Tyranids, Orks, Chaos creatures, Eldar... As for my painting... Well, I guess I'd call it average, but it's been more than a decade since I last painted a miniature, so right now I'm sure it would be quite terrible!

EA: I used to be a hobbyist in my high school years. I started with Wood Elves, then went on to collect a complete army of Eldar and a smaller Chaos one for 40K. I liked the game a lot, but I loved painting and sculpting even more. I'd say I was an average painter, but I was terribly slow, because I loved filling my miniatures with details and freehand symbols.

Below: The series has it all, from Dark Angels and Space Marines to shock troopers and many more, battling on an epic scale.

CH: What's the most appealing thing about drawing the Warhammer 40K universe?

TB: It's a great challenge. It forces me out of my comfort zone and requires me to draw huge scale scenes, detailed architectures, awesome characters, action scenes... and I love a challenge that gives me a chance to truly prove myself. Then, the Dark Angels Space Marines! My favourite chapter. It's a pleasure and an honour to draw them, and it's so cool that I can use my own miniatures as reference for work. I have been hoarding heaps of gothic architecture reference and it's been fascinating. And then the reimagining stage, where I need to

blend those references with a dark, far-future aesthetic, has been a very creative endeavour for me.

CH: Enrica, what sort of tone were you looking for when selecting your colour palette for the series?
EA: Warhammer 40K's setting is a very dark and grim one, so I need to keep that in mind when I choose my palette. Of course, being a story centred on the Dark Angels, the basic colour scheme is limited for some of the characters, but I can go crazy with panels showing starscapes, architectures and Chaos monsters and create contrasts of colours and lights.

CH: Do Games Workshop have input on designs etc, or are you given free rein to do what you want on the book?
TB: They check our work and see that we're properly portraying the universe and characters of Warhammer 40,000, but usually it's George who tells me first if I'm making some continuity mistake. The franchise is based on very exacting designs, and so it's crucial to get every armour, symbol, starship and vehicle right.

CH: Did you look back at the old Warhammer comic?
TB: To be honest, no, I've never really seen any of them. I only looked at the miniatures and the great artwork that has been produced over the decades.
EA: I never had the chance to read any of the previous Warhammer comics. When researching, before starting to work on #0, I collected images as reference and found some pages from the old series, but I haven't had the pleasure of reading any of them.

Above: Issue 1 kicks off a story arc titled "Will Of Iron" and is available in a choice of five variant covers, including this one by Bettin and Angiolini

CH: Who is your favourite character to draw or colour?
TB: Sabbathiel!
EA: Tazio and I worked closely on her design and colour palette and I love the final result. She's always showing strong emotions and that's great because I can experiment with light cuts on her, to underline the atmosphere and her personality.

> The franchise is based on very exacting designs, so it's crucial to get every detail right

CH: Did you take any visual inspiration from history?
TB: I think my folder containing gothic architecture photos is well over a gigabyte right now. Does that answer the question?
EA: We did for Sabbathiel's design: her clothes are a mixture of different references from the past. Tazio is putting a lot of study into architecture, and as for me, I'm taking a lot of inspiration from art history, in particular Baroque paintings – they had an outstanding use of light and colour.

CH: How far along are you now?
TB: We're in the middle of production. Right now I'm pencilling the most epic battle scene I have ever drawn. You can look forward to seeing some incredible variety of scenes and situations, from ruined hive planets to warp storms and space hulks, and much much more!

Warhammer 40,000 1 is published by Titan on 12 October.

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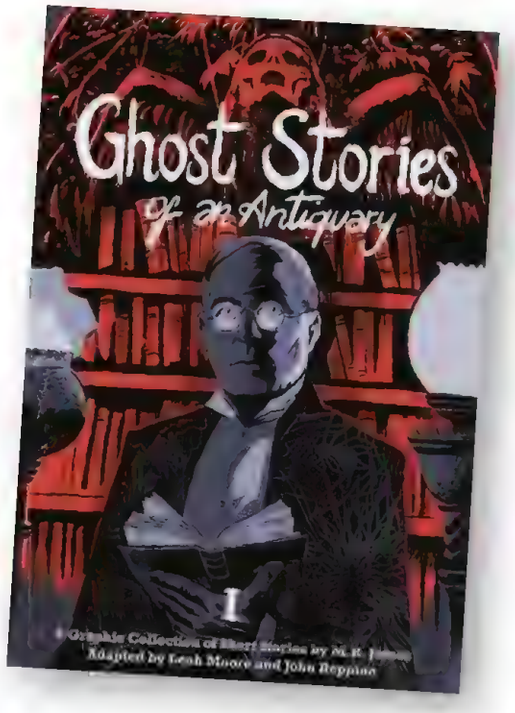
LEAH MOORE AND JOHN REPPION



The ever-experimental pair tell **Stephen Jewell** about turning MR James's *Ghost Stories Of An Antiquary* into a graphic novel.

Comic Heroes: You've previously adapted *Dracula* and *Alice In Wonderland* for comics. Do you enjoy working on adapting other people's works as much as writing your own original stories?

John Reppion: I really enjoy adaptation but a lot of other writers might find it annoying and frustrating. It's a process that we kind of perfected with *Dracula*, and I think we're genuinely good at it. Because we work as a duo we've always been obsessed with blocking things out and breaking things down as much as we can so that either of us can then start working a story or a series at any given point and take up from where the other left off. Adapting, for us, is just really taking that process to the *n*th degree – breaking a story down into beats, pages and panels. Sometimes it's about paring down dialogue, or rephrasing it to get to the essence of what's being said, but there wasn't really much of that to be done with MR James.

CH: What methods did you use to adapt the stories? Have you retained much of James's original prose and dialogue?

Leah Moore: James wrote his ghost stories to be read aloud, so he is the narrator of all of his tales. The voice that you hear is his, so we had to preserve that as much as we could. Some people tend to think of him as a kind of fusty, dusty writer but he's actually very concise – he just wrote in an almost deceptively conversational tone much of the time.

CH: How did this compare to adapting other authors such as Bram Stoker and Lewis Carroll?

LM: Adapting James's work into comics actually proved to be much easier because he has a very clear sense of what he wants the reader – or listener, as it was originally intended – to "see" and what he wants them to only imagine or speculate on. He's a very visual storyteller and, in fact, when it came to the big reveal in many of the stories, we were able to just drop in James's own description rather than try to rephrase it ourselves. He was pretty much writing panel descriptions for most of his big reveals.

This page: Moore and Reppion's graphic novel is published on the 80th anniversary of MR James's death.

CH: You've got four very different artists illustrating *Ghost Stories Of An Antiquary*'s four stories, so how did you come to select them?

LM: We had a very long wish list of people, which was gradually whittled down. Alisdair Wood's work on "The Ash-Tree" is absolutely fantastic, but alongside that kind of inky, Gothic stuff we wanted to make sure we had some different styles. Aneke, Kit Buss and Fouad Mezher (who draw "Canon Albric's Scrap-book," "Lost Hearts" and "The Mezzotint" respectively) are not necessarily

Mrs Mothersole was her name
She differed from the ordinary run of village witches only in being rather better off and in a more influential position
Efforts were made to save her by several reputable farmers of the parish
They did their best to testify to her character and showed considerable anxiety as to the verdict of the jury
But what seems to have been fatal to the woman was the evidence of the then proprietor of Castringham Hall
He deposed to witnessing her three times from his window at full moon, climbing "the ash-tree by my house" clad only in her shift
She cut twigs with a curved knife and talked to herself
The third time he went straight to Mrs Mothersole's house
He loitered at her door until finally she came out, very cross and apparently very sleepy
He had no good explanation to offer of his visit
On each occasion Sir Matthew had tried to capture the woman, but she had always taken alarm at some accidental noise
And all he saw was a large hare running across the park toward the village

Later in the evening, some few retired to Williams' rooms
I have little doubt that whist was played and tobacco smoked.
WHAT D'YOU MAKE OF IT, GARWOOD? YOU'RE A MAN WHO KNOWS HIS ART.
GOT IT FROM BRITNELL ON APPROVAL, BUT I'M NOT ENTIRELY SOLD ON IT.
IT'S REALLY A VERY GOOD PIECE OF WORK, WILLIAMS; IT HAS QUITE A FEELING OF THE ROMANTIC PERIOD.
THE LIGHT IS ADMIRABLY MANAGED, AND THE FIGURE, TOO.
I MEAN, IT'S RATHER TOO GROTESQUE, BUT IT'S SOMEHOW VERY IMPRESSIVE.
YES, ISN'T IT?

artists who you might immediately imagine tackling James, but they have all done wonderful, amazing work. We wanted to offer people who aren't already James fans an "in" that wasn't necessarily presented in what might be considered a traditional horror comics style.

CH: *Ghost Stories Of An Antiquary* features the first four stories in the original collection, so are you hoping to do a second instalment, which will include the well-known "Oh, Whistle, And I'll Come To You, My Lad"?

LM: We've actually already adapted all eight stories, including our adaptation of "Whistle", but they've been split into two books, and the next one will hopefully be out in 2017. After that, we'd love to move on to James's other books like *More Ghost Stories*, so you'll probably need a whole new spare shelf by the time we're finished.

Above: As these excerpts from "The Ash-Tree" and "The Mezzotint" show, the adaptations are drawn in distinctive styles.

CH: Does *Ghost Stories Of An Antiquary* share many themes with your other work?

JR: It wasn't until fairly recently that I realised that The English Weird is a theme which runs through pretty much everything I write. Certainly outside of comics, when I'm writing articles for *Daily Grail* and *Fortean Times*, and fiction for books like ST Joshi's *Black Wings V* and Jonathan Green's *Shakespeare vs Cthulhu*, it's really my main "thing."

CH: You named many of the characters in your recent *Judge Dredd Megazine* series, Storm Warning, after occult authors like Arthur Machen and Sax Rohmer...

JR: When we came to pitch a Brit-Cit series it just made sense that we should try to tap into that same weird Britishness that John Smith's Strange & Darke had (both stories have been included in the *Brit-Cit Noir* collection), and then take it up a notch. There are lots of nods and winks to our sources in Storm Warning, and the Judges' names are some of the most noticeable ones.

> We wanted to offer [stories] that aren't necessarily in a traditional horror comics style

CH: Black Shuck, your *2000 AD* series with Steve Yeowell, also explores the supernatural...

JR: With Black Shuck, our original idea was to create something that was inspired by *Heavy Metal* and Simon Bisley with lots of massive swords and blood splatters. The first series was loosely inspired by Beowulf and included Scandinavian folklore about trolls, curses and semi-corporeal guardians of treasure hoards. With the second series, we wanted to get into UK folklore a bit more, and in particular the Black Dog folklore which seems to be bound up with the Vikings and their incursions.

Ghost Stories of an Antiquary is published by SelfMadeHero on 27 October.

SIMON FURMAN AND GEOFF SENIOR

The *Transformers* veterans reunite with *To The Death*. **Russell Sheath** finds out more...

Comic Heroes: Can you give us the "elevator pitch" for *To The Death*?

Simon Furman: The story is set in a dystopian future where governments have been dismantled and the world is run by three giant corporations. The planet itself is a used-up commodity and there's a plan afoot to wipe out the earth and its inhabitants. Our protagonist, who has everything taken away from him and has nothing left to lose, is determined to prove one man can still make a difference in this bleak world. There's also an element of gaming, where there's a mass-populace game that's going on, where the population participate and to a degree are hardwired into the game, where they can influence the "real-world" off-planet combat.

CH: Tell us about the influences you drew upon for the project?

SF: I think we were both channelling that *Dragon's Claws* vibe and wanted to do something as a future, sci-fi combat and gaming mash-up, but to put it into a completely new package.

Geoff Senior: Prior to starting we had been chatting about doing something and what appealed to me was the storytelling aspect and presenting the story in a more filmic, storyboard style, away from traditional "panels on a page", comic story telling. From the first script you could see the *Dragon's Claws* influence – it was always going to have a military feel.

CH: You both seem to enjoy the world-building aspect of creating new concepts.

GS: When you build a world, you don't only create the characters but the world they live in too, so that was quite intense and it really grew and grew as we worked on it.

SF: I love the world-building part of it and developing everything from scratch. I know where Geoff's strengths are, so, when world-building, I knew that Geoff would be able to cut loose in the design of the things that inhabit the world we were creating.

GS: It's hard to predict what the future is going to look like, so one thing I didn't do in *To The Death* is have lots of hover vehicles and stuff like that. The vision we have is one where technology is present, but people and society are at different levels, so not everyone has access to the most advanced technology. For example, there are very few laser beams in this, the weapons technology is all heavy machine guns or some kind of "real-world" high-velocity

This page: *To The Death* is on the web now. The exclusive print graphic novel *To The Death: Forged By Fire* is set before the web episodes, provides key background to the main story, and is available only via the Kickstarter campaign.

projectile. There's something about the visual punch and impact of drawing something with a shell ejecting that you don't get from a laser.

SF: We also wanted to accentuate the differences between the "haves" and the "have-nots", so you have these people living up in the clouds, disconnected from the grunge and grime, the overcrowding and the poverty. If there was a model for this and especially Geoff's style in this, it's *Aliens* as opposed to a slick, *Star Trek* vision of the future.

CH: When we look at *To The Death* and at *Dragon's Claws*, there is that bleak vision of the future that British creators seem to gravitate towards.

SF: We both worked on *2000 AD* and I think there's always been an edge to British creators, which amounted to a sensitivity, which was exported to America via Vertigo. The thing that connects Vertigo, *2000 AD* and *To The Death* is that nobody is pulling any punches. Sci-fi at its best is veiled satire and social commentary.

> There's always been an edge to British creators. The thing is, nobody is pulling any punches

CH: Back in the '80s, the Marvel UK *Transformers* comic was selling around 200,000 copies a week in the UK alone, which is huge when compared to today's numbers. You were both a large part of the success of that comic. Is there a sense of "the band coming back together" after all these years?

SF: Geoff and I have worked together, off and on, over the years, but Geoff has been in advertising now for 20 years, so this is certainly Geoff's largest body of comics work in all that time. We haven't worked on anything substantial since *Dragon's Claws*, back in the day.

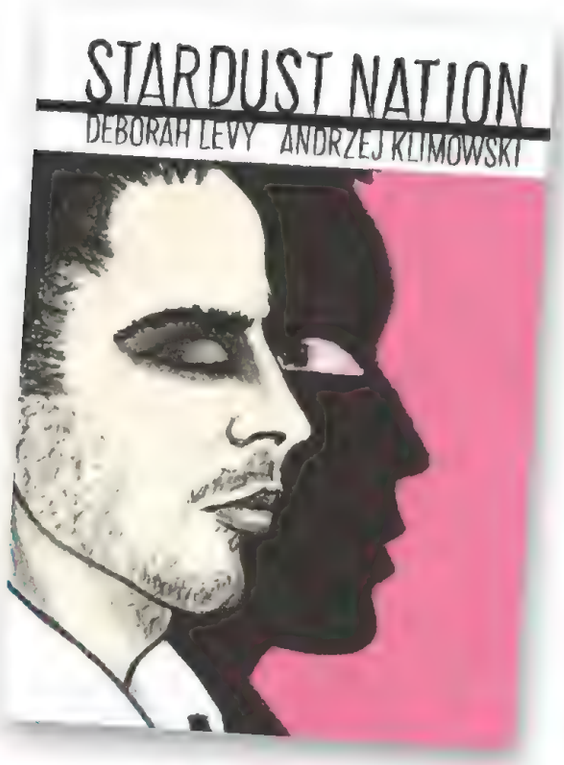
GS: I'd say this is the largest piece of work we've worked on and the single biggest project. I was fired up to get back into comics and to work with Simon again. I'm thoroughly enjoying it.

CH: What are your plans for *To The Death*? How can fans get hold of the book?

SF: We are launching digitally, but for fans of the *Death's Head, Dragon's Claws, Transformers* era, what they want is print. So, alongside the 18-part digital comic, we are doing a Kickstarter. The Kickstarter launched in September and will centre around a one-off, separate backstory, which will only be available in print, in a widescreen, *Frank Miller's 300* style format.

GS: Going back to world-building, we are also using the website and our Facebook page to offer background content to the book, the characters and the world, which I'm very excited about. As a fan I love that background and value added content, so I'm excited to bring that to our readers.

Above: *To The Death* is visceral and immersive. Senior's art is a striking, surprisingly effective blend of impressionistic line art and polished digital effects.



DEBORAH LEVY

The Man Booker Prize nominated author tells **Will Salmon** about her debut graphic novel, *Stardust Nation*...

© GETTY

Comic Heroes: First off, can you tell us a little about the premise of *Stardust Nation*?

Deborah Levy: *Stardust Nation* has a weird premise: it's about one man having a nervous breakdown on behalf of another man. Yet it is psychologically true. When I wrote this story, I was thinking about the dynamics of bullying. It goes something like this: the bully cannot feel whatever it is he feels, so he needs to find someone who can do the feeling for him. Let's guess he feels angry, powerless, undermined. He looks for someone who is vulnerable and can't fight back, and then sets about making that person feels angry, powerless, undermined – on his behalf. The awful thing about this strange behaviour is that it is effective, it works. We see this dynamic in the playground and it travels right through to the workplace.

The second element of this story is the way in which commercials have to crash into the unconscious of the consumer and end with the message, "buy this product." The third element is to do with physics, the way we are all made of stardust. So the story is about the conversation between these three ideas.

CH: *Stardust Nation* is based on one of your short stories. What made this particular story suitable for adaptation?

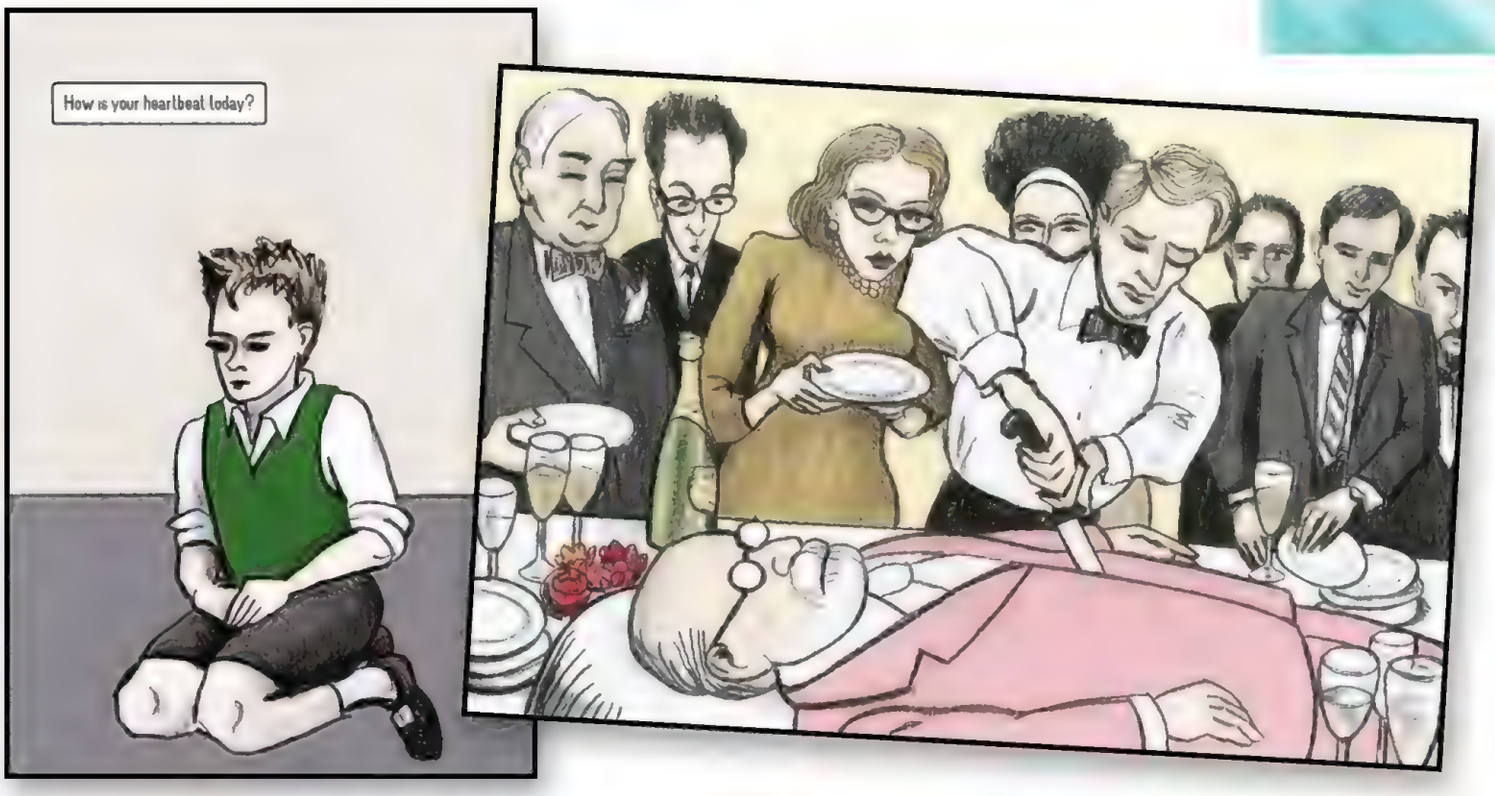
DL: The slippage between the identities of the two men is visually interesting – it is really about identity theft. *Stardust Nation* is a complex story, there's a great deal going on, so the adaptation has to have a kind of depth charge, while appearing to be quite simply told. The story borrows from Noir and from Hitchcock, but [the artist, Andrzej] Klimowski has his own visual language and that's how it should be.

This page: *Stardust Nation* by Deborah Levy and illustrator Andrzej Klimowski is published by SelfMadeHero.

CH: How did you find the experience of adapting the story into a new medium?

DL: The graphic novel has more in common with cinema than literature – it is visual storytelling.

When I was five years old my mother employed a Dutch female tutor to teach me mathematics and biology. I have forgotten her name now but she always had a breezy morning manner when she walked into the nursery in her high-heeled white leather shoes.



Although I am sitting on the edge of my bed in my West London apartment sipping vodka from my eggcup my mind is very much elsewhere.
Imagine a butterfly displayed in a glass case suddenly flying towards you with the pin still in its body

Above: The graphic novel is bursting with surreal images, which become more and more disquieting as advertising executive Nick Gazidis is drawn deeper and deeper into the memories of his alcoholic, "shamanistic" boss Tom Banbury.

So it required a brutal paring-down of the original story and a different structure.

CH: Is adapting something harder or easier than writing something completely new?
DL: I don't know. The story was already laid out. But adaptation always makes something new from the original. Otherwise the artist is just illustrating a story.

> It's complex, so it has a kind of depth charge while appearing to be quite simply told

CH: You noted that advertising is another theme. How do you feel about the business of marketing and how it affects people?
DL: My interest in advertising is really to do with the strategies that are put to work to make us yearn and want things.

CH: This is your debut graphic novel. What appeals to you about working in the medium?
DL: I am just a nerdy writer who spends her life figuring out how I can reach my ideas with language. So it is appealing to figure out how to reach those ideas in a visual language.

CH: What qualities do you think Andrzej Klimowski brings to *Stardust Nation*, as an artist?
DL: Klimowski has a surreal imagination and he is witty. I particularly like how he draws people. He avoids visual cliché and creates something we have never seen before, yet is familiar. I guess that makes for an uncanny atmosphere. CH

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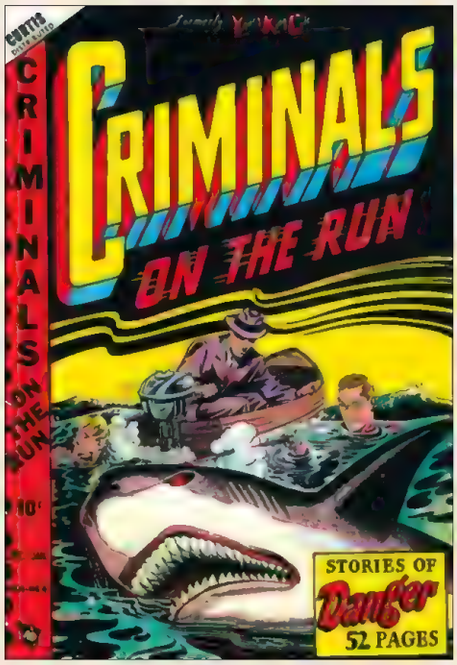
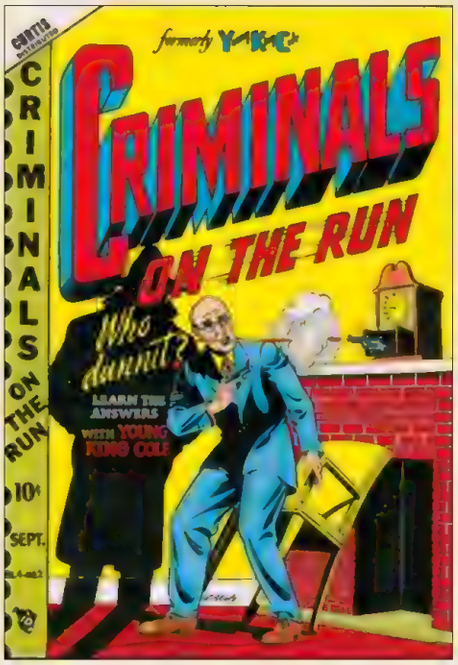
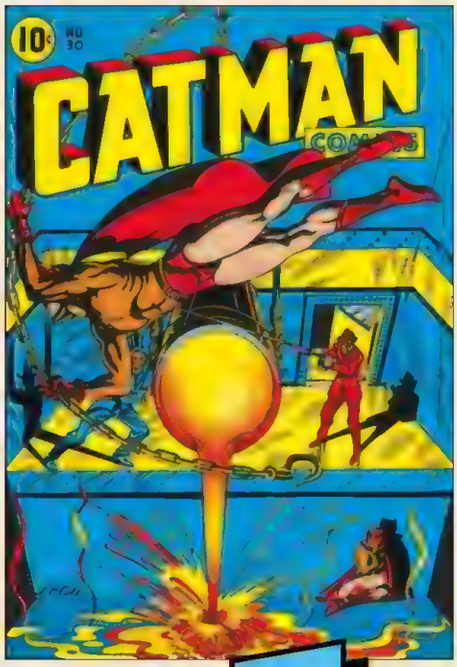
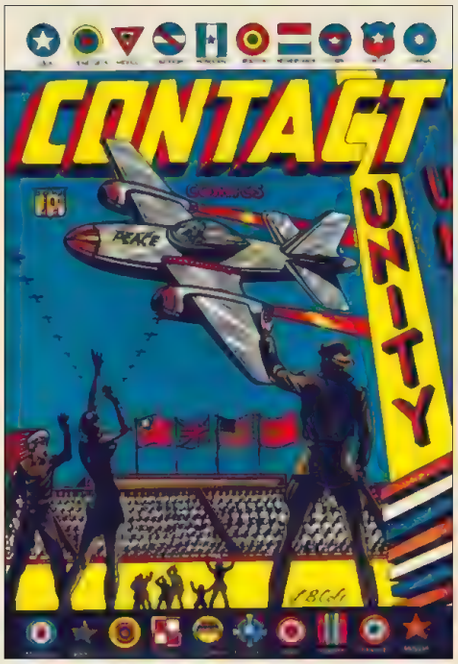


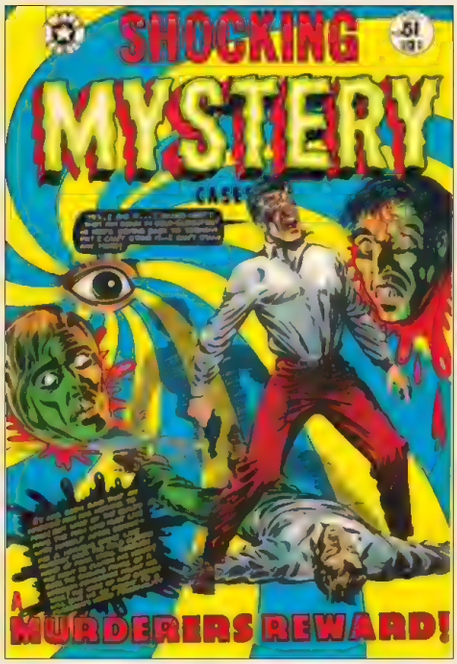




Cover Stars

LB COLE





Bright, bold and beautiful, the covers of Leonard "Len" Brandt Cole are thrilling flashbacks to the Golden Age of comics. A fan of Edgar Rice Burroughs' pulp adventures, it's easy to see why Cole was attracted to the medium. He did his first work on The Flash alongside Louis Goodman Ferstadt, before taking on then-popular characters like Lash Lightning, Magno and Captain Courageous for Ace Magazines. But while his interiors were solid, it was his glorious covers that Cole would best become known for. After an unspectacular debut on *4 Favorites* #13, he developed a style centred on what he called "poster colours". Look at the examples here and you'll see what he meant. Cole's worlds were vividly exciting, whatever the genre.

> "BRIGHT, BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL, COLE'S COVERS CENTRE ON 'POSTER COLOURS'"

***Black Light: The World Of LB Cole* is available now from Fantagraphics.**

SORCERER SUPREME!

THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY PROVED THAT SECOND-STRINGERS CAN BECOME A MAJOR HIT. IS **DOCTOR STRANGE** MARVEL'S NEXT SURPRISE SUPERSTAR? **DAVID BARNETT** EXPLORES THE MYSTIC'S HISTORY...

MEN CALL HIM DR. STRANGE!
NEVER HAVE YOU KNOWN HIS LIKE!
IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE AND PRIVILEGE FOR THE EDITORS OF STRANGE TALES TO PRESENT, QUIETLY AND WITHOUT FANFARE, THE FIRST OF A NEW SERIES, BASED UPON A DIFFERENT KIND OF SUPER-HERO---
DR. STRANGE
MASTER OF
BLACK MAGIC!

Fame, said the Beat writer Jack Kerouac, was old newspapers blowing down Bleecker Street. In the Marvel Universe it isn't fame that stirs the pages of discarded yellowing newsprint on this famous thoroughfare in New York's hipster-ville Greenwich Village, but something far more mysterious, if equally nebulous.

For this is where Doctor Strange, the Master of the Mystic Arts, has made his home since his introduction to the Marvel canon in 1963, when he opened up a portal to a whole new dimension – the Occult – in the world of the emerging heroes more usually based on principles of science (even if that science was inevitably spurious and commonly involved the favourite '50s B-movie plot device of radiation causing mutations instead of horrific injuries and agonising death...).

For more than half a century, Doctor Strange has been one of those characters more recognisable to the comic book cognoscenti than the general public. But, of course, the unstoppable juggernaut of the Marvel Cinematic Universe is set to change that in November when the good Doctor hits the big screen, with Benedict Cumberbatch throwing on his gold-and-red cloak to face things beyond the ken of mere mortals.

But who is Doctor Strange? And from whence did he come, this moustachioed defender of Earth at its mystical front-lines, his cape bound at his neck with an amulet housing the mysterious Eye of Agamotto, traversing the mind-warping realities of other dimensions, a colourful oath for every occasion? (In this as in so many things, Strange was completely different from the usual wise-cracking Marvel hero. Take your pick from "By the hoary hosts of Hoggoth!", "By the many moons of Munnipoor!", "By the crimson bands of Cyttorak!" and many, many more.)

Let's take a look at the fictional biography first. Stephen Strange is a brilliant but arrogant surgeon to whom money and status are all that matter – so much so that when told one of his patients wants to thank him after another successful operation he callously responds: "I can't be bothered! Just be sure he pays his bill!" Then Strange is involved in a devastating car crash. He survives, but his hands suffer "nerve damage" of some kind, leaving him unable to perform surgery.

Spurning offers to teach or assist others, Strange becomes consumed by the quest to somehow cure his hands. In later retellings of the story we hear that he squanders his fortune on fruitless treatments and carries out

illegal back-alley procedures to scrape together more money – given that he's unfit to operate, he's presumably treating only the most desperate, or criminals in hiding. He "loses track of time" and becomes a homeless drifter, "little more than a human derelict."

While lurking at the docks Strange overhears two old sea-dogs discussing someone called The Ancient One, who "can cure anything... by some magic power." Dishevelled, unshaven, a cigarette dangling from his lips, Strange sees a glimmer of hope and sets off in search of this miracle cure.

After many months he stumbles into a torch-lit stone chamber in the Himalayas and stands before a wizened, grey-bearded man. But aid is not so easily found as the Ancient One, for it is he, immediately gets the measure of Stephen Strange.

"I heal none save those who deserve it!" he proclaims. "The power of my magic must never be wasted on the undeserving! First, you must prove you are worthy!"

SEEING THE LIGHT

Strange bitterly scoffs but the weather has closed in and he has no choice but to remain. He discovers that the Ancient One isn't alone in his remote retreat: he has an apprentice, Mordo, who aspires to succeed the old boy as the world's Sorcerer Supreme. But Mordo is a menace, and Strange catches him trying to hasten along the Ancient One's passing. Mordo clamps a magical gag on him that prevents him from blowing the plot.

Desperate to try to warn the Ancient One of Mordo's treachery, it's here that Strange has a change of heart. When the aged mystic offers Strange the chance to become his second disciple and learn the tricks of the trade himself, he accepts in the hope that he can find a way to turn in the villain... and thus moves from selfishness to selflessness, proving his worthiness after all – remember >

SLOWLY, THE FIGURE SPEAKS ... IN A VOICE WHICH IS NOT A VOICE ... MOUTHING WORDS WHICH ARE MORE THAN WORDS ... EXPRESSING THOUGHTS NO MORTAL HAS EVER GLEANED BEFORE!
I AM ETERNITY! HEED MY MESSAGE AND REMAIN SILENT! FOR NONE MAY SPEAK WHEN I AM PRESENT!
YOU ARE THE SECOND MORTAL TO STAND BEFORE ME! THE FIRST WAS HE WHOM YOU SERVE ... KNOWN TO YOU AS THE ANCIENT ONE! IT WAS TO HIM I GAVE THE MAGIC AMULET, AND THE POWER IT CONTAINS!

Above: The cosmic mind of Steve Ditko at work. **Opposite:** Ditko's original design in the very first Strange story.

"STRANGE LEARNS HUMILITY... AND ALONG WITH IT, A WHOLE BUNCH OF COOL MAGIC SPELLS"

ALL IMAGES © MARVEL

NONE SEEK ETERNITY UNLESS THEY DESIRE POWER!
BUT BEFORE GRANTING SUCH A BOON I MUST LEARN IF YOU BE WORTHY!
REMAIN MOTIONLESS WHILST I BATHE THEE IN THE MYSTIC GLOW OF REVEALMENT
HIS POWER IS BEYOND MEASURE... BEYOND HUMAN KEN. I FEEL EVERY FIBRE OF MY BEING EXPOSED TO HIS NAKED SCRUTINY!
ENOUGH! I HAVE LEARNED WHAT I SOUGHT. THE ANCIENT ONE PROVED HIS WISDOM WHEN HE CHOSE SUCH AS YOU FOR HIS DISCIPLE!

Above: While Doctor Strange has perhaps never become a top-tier title, the character and concepts have endured.

the Marvel mantra, "With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility." The Ancient One reveals that he has been aware of Mordo's shenanigans all along and boots him out – to become, of course, a recurring arch-nemesis – while Strange, previously too proud to become a teacher, now becomes the pupil. He learns humility at last... and along with it, a whole bunch of cool magic spells.

This origin isn't actually told until several issues after Doctor Strange is introduced in *Strange Tales* issue 110, published in July 1963. Although scripter-editor Stan Lee soon thought better of the negative connotations of billing him as the "Master of Black Magic," we meet Strange fully-formed, living in his townhouse at 177A Bleecker Street in the heart of New York's hepcat district Greenwich Village. His Sanctum Sanctorum is guarded by his manservant Wong, handy with a bit of the old Martial Arts as well as serving dinner... This was the '60s, of course, with Eastern manservants established as a staple of pulp fiction from the Green Hornet's Kato in the '30s all the way through to Inspector Clouseau's Cato in 1964, the year after Strange debuted.

177A Bleecker Street is an estate agent's dream, one of those houses that really is bigger on the inside than the outside suggests – corridors go to odd places, and rooms never seem to be quite where they were the last time you looked. This is probably thanks to the rather impressive collection of artefacts Doctor Strange has assembled within its walls, most notably the Book of Vishanti, the most powerful magical grimoire in the Marvel Universe.

From his base in the heart of New York, Doctor Strange was ready for his adventures... and what adventures they were! Strange finds himself exploring hallucinogenic dimensions that look like what you might get if you turned MC Escher loose in a Dulux paint factory, with an increasingly off-the-wall cast of

"DITKO WROTE THE STORY, CREATED IT FULLY REALISED"

characters such as Nightmare, Mephisto and the flame-headed Dormammu, who were not just rival mages but other-dimensional beings and made Mordo look like a cheap side-show card sharp.

So much for the character and his fictional origins. But where did Doctor Strange actually come from? Well, he was created in the white heat of the birth of the Marvel Universe, which began with the Fantastic Four in 1961, and then saw Spider-Man introduced in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 in 1962, the same year that Thor debuted in *Journey Into Mystery* and the Hulk was introduced the first issue of his own title. The X-Men and the Avengers were on the newsstands just two months after *Strange Tales* #110, so you might assume that as part of the vanguard of the brand new Marvel Age, Doctor Strange sprang from the fertile imagination of Stan Lee. It's certainly his name as writer in those early issues. But it's in the credits for the artwork, and the legendary Steve Ditko, that the real origin of Doctor Strange lies.

IN SEARCH OF STEVE DITKO

TV personality Jonathan Ross is not only a massive comics fan with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the genre, particularly Marvel's corner of it, but he's also probably one of the foremost experts on the work of Ditko. Back in 2007 he made a documentary for BBC4 in which he went in search of the elusive comics genius in his Manhattan studio. And Ross is in no doubt that Ditko – now 88 – deserves all the credit as the creator of Doctor Strange.

"I was a Steve Ditko fan from the moment I started reading comics," says Ross. "Spider-Man was always my favourite character because he was everything I was as a kid – I was the nerdy one who wore glasses. It was me. But it was also Ditko's art which was what I loved about the comic, so when Doctor Strange came along I was hooked on that as well."

LET ME PONDER WELL MY NEXT MOVE --FOR THE TIME IN WHICH TO FIND HER MAY BE SHORT!
PERHAPS A SPELL--AN INCANTATION TO THE SPIRIT OF THE DEPARTED ANCIENT ONE-- MAY YIELD A CLUE TO HER WHEREABOUTS...
ELSE I MUST TAKE TO THE AIR WITH MY CLOAK OF LEVITATION AND SURVEY THIS WHOLE...
WHAT WAS THAT?! A SUDDEN NOISE BEHIND ME!
AT LAST-- I FACE THE FIRST GHASTLY PERIL WHICH AWAITS ME ON THIS WORLD BEYOND THE PALE!
TO ALL APPEARANCES, IT SEEMS TO BE A HATE FILLED DEADLY GIGANTIC SLUG--!

Above: The artists who came after Ditko rarely hit the same heights of invention and sheer psychedelic weirdness... but they tried.

It's the classic reinvention of Stephen Strange's character that appeals to Ross. "He goes to the Ancient One for selfish reasons – he's in it for himself because he hasn't learned humility – then he realises he's got to do it for the good of mankind, not just himself. And the idea was all Ditko's."

Ross cites a letter that you can easily find on the internet which Stan Lee wrote in early 1963 to Jerry Bails, who then was running one of the very first comics fanzines, *Alter Ego*. In response to a question that Bails asked about what was next for the Marvel empire, Lee replies: "Well, we have a new character in the works for *Strange Tales* (just a five-page filler named DR STRANGE). Steve Ditko is gonna draw him. Sort of a black magic theme. The first story is nothing great, but perhaps we can make something of him – 'Twas Steve's idea, and I figgered we'd give it a chance..."

"As I understand it," says Ross, "Ditko wrote the story, created it fully realised. In my opinion, Ditko deserves most of the credit for Doctor Strange... at least 80% to 20% in his favour. He needs and deserves full responsibility for creating the character."

What's more, this applies not just to Strange himself, but to the entire outlandish cast of characters that began to populate the Doctor Strange stories. "Take Eternity," says Ross. "It's a genius piece of work. He's this huge, human-shaped character but the interior of him is actually the whole universe. Then you have to look at the other dimensions Ditko created where Doctor Strange travels... It feels like a fully-realised cosmology. Ditko created the rules for these other places, which he didn't break whenever he drew them... They >

SO FAR I HAVE SOUGHT ONLY TO DEFEND MYSELF -- TO REASON WITH YOU, MORDO!
BUT NOW, IT IS CLEAR THAT ONLY SHEER, UNADULTERATED POWER CAN BREACH THE TWISTED BASTION OF YOUR CRUEL RAGE!
YOU WHO WOULD TOY WITH THE MYSTIC FORCES, BEHOLD WITNESS HOW THOSE FEARSOME POWERS ARE USED BY ONE WHO HAS TRULY MASTERED
EVEN AS HE SPEAKS, DR STRANGE SURROUNDS HIMSELF WITH AN ETHEREAL MAGNETIC VORTEX, FROM WHICH EMANATE ENDLESS, OVERWHELMING VIBRATIONS OF PURE ENERGY -- A SOUND BEYOND THE VERY FABRIC OF SOUND ITSELF!
BEHOLD, MORDO -- NEITHER YOU NOR ALL YOUR MULTITUDE CAN STAND BEFORE THE UNRELENTING MIGHT OF THE TRUE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!
AARRRH!

STRANGE TALES
DOCTOR STRANGE
NICK FURY, AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D.
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
12¢ IND 160 SEPT
"IF THIS PLANET YOU WOULD SAVE!"
BACK AGAIN! THE MOST DEADLY, DEMONIACAL FOE OF ALL --- THE MERCILESS MORDO!

Above: Arch-nemesis Mordo and his hooded henchmen were the least exotic and therefore least interesting of Strange's foes.

are very simply the most beautifully-rendered pieces of comic art.

"Doctor Strange appealed to a lot of students and hippies at the time and everyone thought that the artists must be dropping acid tabs to create those other worlds, but I think Steve was just doing what he thought was right for the comic."

In fact, Ditko's philosophy and politics were probably a world away from the freewheelin' Greenwich Village liberals – he was a fan of the work of philosopher-novelist Ayn Rand, who has received fresh traction in recent years with American neo-liberals. Indeed, Ross recalls a story where Ditko had drawn a Spider-Man page with the Wall-Crawler swinging over a placard-waving student protest and wondering to himself what they had to protest about... Stan Lee, ever more down with what the kids might find appealing, re-wrote the thought bubble to have Spidey giving a mental thumbs-up to the protesters for sticking it to The Man.

If it sounds like Ross has a downer on Lee, he hasn't. "Stan is a genius," he says, "but I think it's time for credit where it's due in terms of the artists he worked with, especially Steve Ditko on Doctor Strange."

Ditko continued on *Strange Tales* until issue 147. Interestingly, the book was split between Strange and the Human Torch, and later Nick Fury, Agent Of SHIELD, and the Sorcerer Supreme got the main cover spot just once in all that time before #146. He did, however, get Clea... The daughter of one of the lieutenants of dread other-dimensional tyrant Dormammu, Clea helped Strange defeat the flame-headed villain and returned with him to Greenwich Village, becoming his pupil and eventually lover. Often clad in a plunging neckline and fishnet tights, Clea has the honour, perhaps dubious, of ranking 28th in a *Comic Buyer's Guide* list of the "100 Sexiest Women in Comics".

A DIFFERENT WORLD

The Master Of The Mystic Arts proved popular with readers as well as with women from other worlds, and by the summer of 1968 *Strange Tales* was retitled to *Doctor Strange*, continuing its numbering from the previous title. Under the creative team of Roy Thomas, Gene Colan and Tom Palmer, Strange suffered an experimental make-over to give him more mainstream super-hero appeal,

"I WANTED TO KNOW WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE A MAGICIAN"

AND, AS THE VERY AIR SEEMS TO GROW MORE STILL...
INSTANTLY, AN EERIE GLOW PERVADES THE ENTIRE CHAMBER... AS A FEARFUL FIGURE BRIDGES THE UNIMAGINABLE GULF BETWEEN THE WORLDS...
THE ONE WHOM I AWAIT IS COMING!
I SENSE HIS PRESENCE ...EVEN, AETH!
SAGAK, FACELESS ONE, YOU WHO ARE SENT BY SATANNISH THE SUPREME!
LET DR. STRANGE HEAR YOUR LIPLESS VOICE.. YOUR SOUNDLESS WORDS!
I COMMAND YOU SPEAK!
IT IS NOT FOR MORTAL MAN TO COMMAND THE HERALD OF SATANNISH, HUMAN!
YET, BECAUSE YOU SPAKE THE PARABLE OF POWER...MY MASTER BIDS ME GIVE YOU AID!
THEN, SHOW ME THAT PLACE WHERE DWELL THOSE UNDER THE SPELL OF EVERLASTING VANISHMENT!
AND SHOW ME THE GIRL WHO IS CALLED...CLEA!
3

"THE LOOK OF THE COMIC, THE DARKNESS IN IT... ALL THAT CAME FROM DITKO"

Above: As the times got more spaced-out, Doctor Strange stories recaptured some of the early Ditko magic.

but it was short-lived. The book was cancelled at the end of 1969.

After that Strange hopped around some of the showcase titles, such as *Marvel Premiere* and *Marvel Feature*, and also appeared in the Roy Thomas created *Defenders* super-team with the Sub-Mariner and the Hulk – other "outsider," loner heroes who didn't fit well into other super-teams. In the early 1970s, Steve Englehart inherited the writing duties on *The Defenders*... and the character of Doctor Strange.

"*The Defenders* was a great idea," recalls Englehart. "It featured these characters who, while they might not actually be 'dark', weren't the shiny heroes of the Avengers and the Fantastic Four. The stories did have a tendency towards the more mystical, even though it was a super-hero title."

At the time, Doctor Strange's own title was being written by comics veteran Gardner Fox with art by Frank Brunner, and when Fox left, Brunner asked for Englehart to join the crew in the Sanctum Sanctorum. Together they created some of the Doctor's most enduring foes, including the highly Lovecraftian Shuma-Gorath. And unlike other writers, Englehart embarked on a little "method writing" to ensure he was portraying the world of magic as well as he possibly could.

"If I was supposed to be writing about a guy who was the Sorcerer Supreme, I figured I should know about magic," he says. "So I read up on as much of the Western magical tradition as I possibly could. I got quite deep into it. I wanted to know just what it was like to be a magician."

For real? Steve Englehart tried to actually become a Master of the Mystic Arts? "I gave it my best shot," he laughs. "I mean, I didn't actually conjure anything up or change the course of mighty rivers but, you know..."

And, while we're on the subject, that old chestnut about Doctor Strange being so way out that the creators must have been on drugs..? "Brunner and I... how shall I say, enjoyed the '70s," says Englehart. "I've never made any secret of that. Not that I think you have to be stoned to do comics, and I very much doubt that Steve Ditko was."

Ah, the Ditko question. Where does Englehart stand on that? "Doctor Strange is a Ditko character," he says. "That's why Strange was so weird from the start. The look of the comic, the darkness in it... all that came from Steve Ditko. Everyone who came after put their own stamp on the book but it was all variations on Ditko's original vision."

For the bulk of the '80s and '90s Strange enjoyed his own title, but the 2000s saw him relegated to occasional guest star, until the *New Avengers*, written by Jonathan Hickman, brought him back into the spotlight in 2013, paving the way for his triumphant return to his own title in 2015 under the creative team of Jason Aaron and Chris Bachalo, in preparation for this year's much-anticipated big screen outing.

From mind-bending other planes to the newspaper-blown streets of Greenwich Village... If fame is as transitory as Jack Kerouac suggested, then Doctor Strange's star has shone and faded and shone again... but never gone away. And now, with Benedict Cumberbatch and the mighty Marvel movie machine set to make him a household name at last, the Sorcerer Supreme's time has properly come at last. All together now... "By the hoary hosts of Hoggoth...!" CH

STRANGE FASCINATION

DOCTOR STRANGE LEADS A TEAM OF WIZARDS IN MARVEL'S NEW **SORCERERS SUPREME** COMIC. **STEPHEN JEWELL** TALKS TO WRITER **ROBBIE THOMPSON** TO FIND OUT MORE...

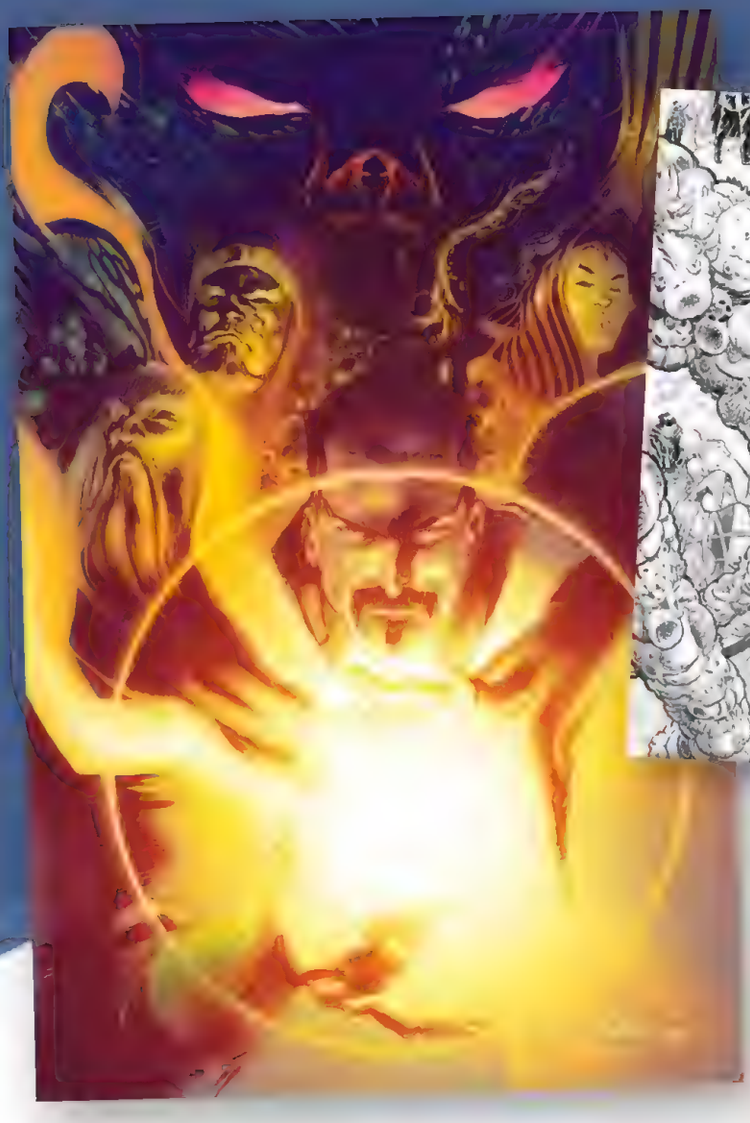
Although he is perhaps best known for his scripting and producing credits on TV series like *Supernatural*, *Jericho* and *The Human Target*, Robbie Thompson is also a lifelong comic book fan, who in recent years has become one of Marvel's most prolific writers. Since making his debut in 2014's Spider-Verse anthology with a two-part tale about a steampunk Spider-Woman, he has carved out his own corner in the Spider-Man universe, regularly scripting the monthly adventures of Silk, Venom: Space Knight and the teenage Peter Parker in *Spidey*. Now Thompson is venturing into the ever-expanding magical realms of the Master Of Mystic Arts as he teams up with artist Javier Rodriguez on the new team book *Doctor Strange And The Sorcerers Supreme*, which is out just in time for Benedict Cumberbatch's debut as Stephen Strange in Marvel's latest cinematic blockbuster.

Comic Heroes: How does scripting comic books compare to working on television series like *Supernatural*?

Robbie Thompson: I love doing both, as they both offer wonderful opportunities to collaborate with great storytellers. The format is very different, but there's a lot of overlap in terms of finding ways to let the characters drive the narrative. There are fewer collaborators in comics than in TV for sure: the artists, colourists and letterers are doing what many crew members would do in TV in that they're acting, designing, lighting and shooting the story.

CH: Has your interest in comics influenced your TV work at all?

RT: Comics have influenced every single show that I've been lucky enough to work on – I've learned a lot from reading comics about pacing out episodic stories, and also drilling down on core character values. Also, in pretty much every >



“THEY HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER, WHICH WON’T BE EASY FOR THEM”

writers’ room that I’ve been in, there’s been more than a few comic book fans. Comics and role-playing games like Dungeons & Dragons are great training grounds for working in TV.

CH: What do you like most about Doctor Strange?

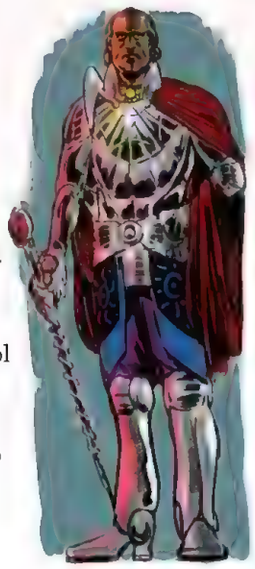
RT: I love how he occupies such a unique place in the Marvel Universe. You have radioactive heroes, mutants and vigilantes, and then you have actual supernatural magic with Doctor Strange. His character demands very visual stories – stories that have bizarre characters, unreal worlds and action, and moments that are very unique to comics. Re-reading the classic Steve Ditko tales has been a ton of fun and very inspiring.

CH: In recent years, Strange has been just the go-to mystical guy for the Avengers. Does the release of the film provide an opportunity for the character to step more into the spotlight?

RT: Absolutely. The way that they’ve rolled out the Marvel cinematic universe has been so grand and so smart, and as a viewer and a fan myself, I’m hungry to see different and unusual corners of the universe that they’ve built. Jason Aaron and Chris Bachalo have carved out a fantastic and cool space in the Marvel comics universe with the *Doctor Strange* solo book, and I’m thrilled to be playing in the sandbox that they’ve built along with artist Javier Rodríguez, inker Alvaro Lopez and colourist Jordie Bellaire.

Above: Behind a lush Rafael Albuquerque cover, a new take on the mystic realms.

Below: Javier Rodriguez character designs for Kushala and a very different Isaac Newton.



CH: With its ensemble line-up, do you consider *Doctor Strange And The Sorcerers Supreme* to be a team book?

RT: When [Senior Editor] Nick Lowe called me up about the book and told me what it was going to be about, the idea of working on a team book was one of the biggest selling points for me, so yes it is definitely a team book. I’ve worked mostly on solo books so far, so getting a chance to see how a group dynamic works was a great appeal to me. I grew up loving team books like *Fantastic Four* and *X-Men* and it’s been fun to go back and read

those old comics and learn from the greats. We've also got a fun dynamic in the team we've built because Sorcerers Supreme tend to work alone. They're used to being able to do what they want. But now they have to find ways to work together, which isn't going to be easy for them, but has certainly been fun for me to write!

CH: Rather than Doctor Strange himself, the group is actually put together by Merlin, and it's quite a diverse line-up...

RT: He plucks them all from different moments in history, so we've got Yao, the Ancient One – or Not-So-Ancient-One, as he's a teenager in this story, and it's a huge shock for Strange to see his mentor like this. Then there's Sir Isaac Newton, who is a total wildcard and looking out for his own needs. Newton brings along his minion, a slightly evolved Mindless One called the Mindful One. Then there's Wiccan, from the future – which is also a big shock for Strange, since that means Strange is not actually the Sorcerer Supreme in years to come...

We're also introducing two brand new characters. Nina, a Brazilian sorcerer, is all action and no talk. She's the big mystery of the group, and is inspired by film noir. Plus there's Kushala, an Apache Sorcerer Supreme, who is hiding a dark secret of her own.

CH: With the series springing out of the cataclysmic "Last Days of Magic" storyline, it opens with the Sorcerers – especially Strange – at quite a low point...

RT: What we learn is that magical time travel comes at a price. Merlin has used magic to pluck this team out of their time, but he's found them all when they're at their weakest or most vulnerable.

Above: Interior art and variant issue 1 cover by Javier Rodriguez.

Below: Rodriguez character designs for Nina, the film noir inspired Brazilian sorcerer, and Merlin.

CH: What qualities does Javier Rodriguez bring to the book?

RT: Working with Javier has been an absolute dream. He's a fantastic collaborator and storyteller, with so many great ideas for characters, twists and scenes. He's wonderful at pushing the book visually and really making it magic. His work really pushes the boundaries of design and layout, and I can't wait for people to see what he's crafted.

CH: Are you liaising with Jason Aaron and Chris Bachalo on the main *Doctor Strange* book?

RT: I'm very fortunate to be working with Nick Lowe and Associate Editor Darren Shan, who oversee the Strange books. They've been keeping us up to speed with everything that's been going on in the solo book and they've been wonderful about keeping us all in contact so that this all plays out and we stay on the same page. CH

Doctor Strange And The Sorcerers Supreme issue 1 is out 26 Oct.

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THE PSYCHEDELIC MASTER

BRENDAN McCARTHY TELLS **STEPHEN JEWELL** ABOUT HIS JOURNEY FROM *STRANGE DAYS* TO *FURY ROAD*

As co-founder of the seminal *Strange Days*, frequent contributor to *2000 AD* and artist on avant garde titles such as *Spider-Man: Fever* and *Shade The Changing Man*, Brendan McCarthy was one of the most distinctive and influential comics artists of the '80s and '90s. But after becoming "a bit bored with the scene," he relocated from his native London to Hollywood in the mid-1990s where he worked as a designer on films including *Highlander 2*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Lost In Space*. Now after co-writing and designing the acclaimed *Mad Max: Fury Road* with director George Miller, he has also returned to comics, writing and illustrating *Dream Gang* for Dark Horse.

"I'd spent over a decade drawing comics and felt that we had accomplished what we had set out to do with the comics medium," McCarthy says of his '90s career change. "The whole world of graphic novels didn't exist 40 years ago, and now it is a rapidly growing part of the culture."

A graduate of Chelsea College of Art, McCarthy started out in 1977 by releasing his own independent title *Sometime Stories* with his good friend the late Brett Ewins, then teaming up with Peter Milligan on a weekly strip, The Electric Hoax, for music weekly *Sounds*. He also got his foot in the door at *2000 AD*, collaborating with Ewins on some *Future Shocks* and drawing some early *Strontium Dog* episodes for *2000 AD*'s short-lived stablemate *Starlord*.

Above: McCarthy's creator-owned graphic novel *Dream Gang*

Opposite: DC called when *Doctor Fate* writer Paul Levitz said he wanted to end the series with "a psychedelic freak-out episode"

When creator-owned comics took off in the early 1980s, Eclipse offered McCarthy, Milligan and Ewins the opportunity to launch their own anthology title, *Strange Days*, in 1984. This continued the adventures of Milligan and McCarthy's sci-fi surf scavenger >

DOCTOR FATE © DC COMICS DREAM GANG © BRENDAN McCARTHY

MAD MAX: FURY ROAD © WARNER BROS

Freakwave, previously serialised in Pacific Comics' *Vanguard*; it owed considerably more than just its post-apocalyptic setting to 1979's original *Mad Max* and its 1981 sequel. Milligan and McCarthy also contributed offbeat superhero series *Paradax*, while Milligan and Ewins were responsible for nihilistic future detective Johnny Nemo.

"Working with Brett and Pete on *Strange Days* back in the early '80s has become a very cherished time in my life," says McCarthy. "We saw ourselves as being more like a pop group or a bunch of art pranksters, and *Strange Days* was our manifesto and declaration of a new comic book era."

Strange Days lasted only three issues, until Eclipse shut up shop in 1994; *Freakwave* and *Paradax* were out of print until they were included in 2013's oversized hardback, *The Best Of Milligan And McCarthy*. The book also features most of the pair's other work together, even the controversial *Skin*, the tale of a young skinhead with thalidomide-related birth defects. Originally commissioned by *2000 AD* offshoot *Crisis* in 1990, it was shelved after the publisher, Fleetway, balked at its language and subject matter and a number of printers refused to print it, but was eventually published by Tundra in 1992.

Above: McCarthy's work on *Mad Max: Fury Road* included everything from design concepts to scene visualisations

Opposite: War Boy concept for *Mad Max: Fury Road*

"We were very keen to see our work from that era collected and served up in a pleasing way," says McCarthy. "You get a great feel for what was a great, inspired run of work by myself and Milligan, as we were on a decade-long hot-streak. I put a lot of effort into re-mastering the book into a pretty definitive collection."

In returning to comics, McCarthy drew John Wagner's Dredd story in this year's *2000 AD Summer Special*, but he expresses disappointment at the small size of today's British comics industry compared to the days of his youth in the late '60s and early '70s. "I dearly wish there were more British comics, and I wish it was possible to earn a living just drawing them," he says, adding that he has recently been looking back at some of his favourite childhood comics such as *The Beano*, *The Dandy*, *Valiant* and *Beezer*.

UNCANNY WORLDS

McCarthy explains that he likes the format of multiple one- or two-page stories, whether stand-alone or serialised. "There were so many different characters and concepts to enjoy in just one newsprint comic. They were amazing packages of entertainment and fun."

Just as important to McCarthy were the various British titles made up of reprints of American stories, which were widely available when he was a boy. "Some of the first American comics I ever saw were either in the old UK edition Superman annuals, which were usually in black-and-white, or in the old *Uncanny Worlds*-type collections that had all that incredible Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby artwork. They were very appealing to me, especially the Ditko stories. I then started buying American superhero comics off the racks when I was a little bit older and had some pocket money off my dad to buy things with. Tellingly, I immediately spent my money on comics!"

Ditko in particular certainly had an impact; McCarthy cites Doctor Strange as "still my favourite Marvel creation". So he could hardly refuse when given the opportunity to write and draw the Sorcerer Supreme in his 2010 mini-series *Spider-Man: Fever*. Considering the attention that >

"WE SAW OURSELVES AS LIKE A POP GROUP OR ART PRANKSTERS"

MAD MAX: FURY ROAD

McCARTHY TELLS ALL ABOUT THE ROAD TO MOVIE SUCCESS AND WHAT'S NEXT...

Did your comics background influence how you approached your contribution to *Mad Max: Fury Road*?
Comics are innate to my being, so of course there was an influence, as comics are very deeply infused into my psyche. But then so are movies! In our ordinary lives, we absorb many hours of film and TV storytelling, pacing and cutting, so we know innately the grammar of film and its way of telling a story.

Were you pleased with how well *Fury Road* was received?
I'm very happy with how the movie came out, and it's gratifying that it's already up there with the first two *Terminators*, *Blade Runner*, *The Matrix*, *Alien* and *Aliens*, *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior*. It really is a modern classic!

You're currently working on a new movie with *Fury Road* director George Miller...
It's a brand new concept, and is, I think, a very strong property. I can't say anything about it at this point, other than to say that it's kind of a fusion of *Happy Feet* – in that it's likely to be mo-cap and high quality CGI – and *Fury Road*, as it's a super-charged comedic adventure too. It all starts with the comic."

the Master of the Mystic Arts is receiving right now ahead of his cinema debut in November, it's ironic that McCarthy was obliged to incorporate Spidey in the three-parter in order to make it viable.

"It was a homage to Lee and Ditko's classic '60s run," says McCarthy. "The 'Eternity' storyline after which Ditko quit drawing the character is, to me, the greatest of the Doctor Strange adventures – Ditko was at his creative peak back then, and he easily rivalled Jack Kirby when it came to epic cosmic-scale stories and mind-bending concepts."

Much as Ditko is best known for his collaborations with Lee, McCarthy too is probably most often thought of in tandem with Peter Milligan and the numerous other writers he has collaborated with over the years, notably in *2000 AD*. But McCarthy admits that he finds the most artistic freedom when he does the whole package himself. "It's great fun working with talented writers," he says. "I prefer to work with other creators who are open to me contributing ideas at the concept, story and script stages. I'm an artist who often creates the whole setup, characters and storylines for a project, so it doesn't really make sense a lot of the time to add a writer for scripting purposes when you'll have to give up 50 per cent of your rights and the first credit."

MYSTIC EXPERIENCE

To McCarthy, writing and drawing a project himself is a completely different process from tackling another writer's efforts. "Given that I'm drawing it as well, I don't need to write a script with lots of visual instructions," he explains. "I mostly concentrate on pacing and dialogue, so it's much more like a written play."

Once the lettering is done, the characters finally come to life as

"IT MAY LEAD TO A BUNCH OF STORIES IN THE DREAMWORLDS"

This page and opposite: McCarthy's art and writing in *Spider-Man: Fever* reflect his love of Steve Ditko's greatest works – particularly Doctor Strange, but also Spider-Man

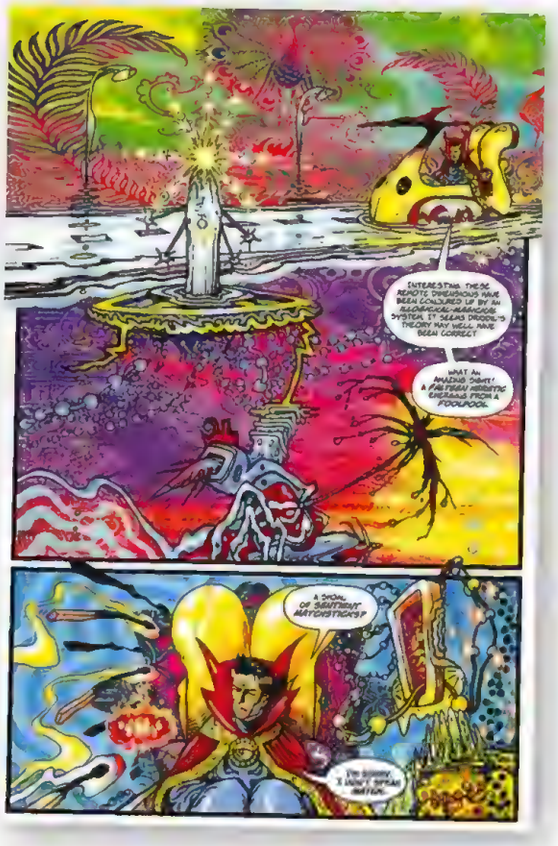
they get to speak for the first time. "That's the magical part for me, and it's why I still do it," he says. "To create a fictional character who speaks to you with the truth and presence of a living person is a powerful experience. The Tibetan sorcery of 'Calling into Being' has recently become meaningful to me, and it's like fictional characters are Tulpic entities that have not yet materialised."

After spending a decade in the film industry (although he moved back from LA to Ireland five years ago), McCarthy felt a need to return to comics. "I wanted to get back to drawing again and telling some of the stories that I had brewing away in the back of my bonce," he says. "It all fell into place one day after DC phoned me out of the blue and offered me a slot in their prestigious *Solo* series. Next, Marvel wanted me to do *Spider-Man: Fever*, and then I did *Zaucer of Zilk* for *2000 AD*. So I just fell back into comics fairly easily."

McCarthy also embarked upon *Dream Gang*, which was serialised in the pages of *Dark Horse Presents* before being collected as a graphic novel. "It may well be the start of a new bunch of stories set in the Dreamworlds," he says. "I've had a long-term interest in dreams and dreaming, and in the mind, the unconscious and [questions such as] 'what is reality? How do we perceive and create the thought-world that we inhabit daily?' I've read a lot of mysticism and wanted to express some ideas on the nature of 'waking up' from dreaming."

INTO THE DREAM

Dream Gang centres on a young man who is transformed into enigmatic avatar the Dream Voyager, before joining a surreal band of superheroes who patrol the ethereal planes of dreams and nightmares. It is informed as much by the Beatles' more psychedelic pieces as by the groundbreaking theories of psychologists like James Hillman, author of *The Dream* and *The Underworld*. "I'm interested in dream-based artists like Franz >



IMAGES © MARVEL. SPIDER-MAN, DOCTOR STRANGE © MARVEL

DREAM GANG © BRENDAN McCARTHY

Kafka and David Lynch, who delve into the dark, nightmarish side of the psyche," McCarthy reveals, "as I like that unsettling darker mood, but I also like that kind of summery *Yellow Submarine* type of dreamy psychedelia. Love's 1967 album *Forever Changes* is featured quite a bit in the story, as the music on it has a nice blend of happiness and foreboding."

McCarthy has also illustrated *Doctor Fate #17*, the final issue in the current series, which sees Khalid Nassour, the New 52 version of DC's mystical hero, taking on the ominous threat of the Dreamspinners. "DC got in touch and asked if I'd like to try drawing Doctor Fate as Paul Levitz was ending his run as writer and wanted to do a psychedelic freak-out episode," says McCarthy, adding that Doctor Fate should follow Doctor Strange onto either the big or small screen.

This page and opposite: The story premise of *Dream Gang* seems reminiscent of Simon and Kirby's pre-Vertigo, mid-'70s version of *Sandman*, but with a very Vertigo sensibility.

"Doctor Fate and Doctor Strange have similarities, in that they are both magic-based characters who deal with the supernatural and extra-dimensional weirdness," he continues. "Interestingly, Doctor Fate predates Doctor Strange by some decades, and I feel that Steve Ditko must have been aware of Doctor Fate when he created Doctor Strange. Doctor Fate has more of a Egyptian flavour to its fantasy, whereas Doctor Strange deals with more traditional occult concerns."

While he says he would be interested in rebooting Doctor Fate if DC allowed him "some creative space," McCarthy also has several of his own ideas that could possibly become his next comics project. "I have a couple of good new stories that are ready to roll as graphic novels, so I'd better pick the one that I want to do next," he laughs. "But I'm not someone who likes getting too booked up ahead of myself. I don't want to know what my schedule is gong to be for the next five years. Being idle is as important as working!" McCarthy, idle? On past form, not likely! CH

"I HAVE GOOD NEW STORIES READY TO ROLL AS GRAPHIC NOVELS"

DREAM GANG
THESE DRIFTING THOUGHTS GO BY...
ENED UNDER SKY
THOUGHT-BUBBLE CAR.
SKETCH

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL

UK COMICS MAINSTAY TONY LEE TELLS **WILL SALMON** ABOUT HIS NEW SCI-FI SUPERNATURAL GRAPHIC NOVEL, **ALSO KNOWN AS**

> **"THE ROGUES HAVE WINGS, BUT THEY'RE KIND OF STEAMPUNK WINGS. IT'S ALL TECHNOLOGY, NOT MAGIC"**

What happens to us after we die? It's a universal question, perhaps the greatest of all life's mysteries. *Also Known As* – a new graphic novel from UK comics stalwart Tony Lee, artist Christopher Jones and colourist Charlie Kirchoff – suggests that the answer isn't quite as comforting as most religions would have you believe...

"It's the story of a guy called Lucas Wilson," explains Lee when *Comic Heroes* meets him in the heart of Soho. "He's a cavalry officer about 100-or-so years ago, and he takes part in the Battle of Wounded Knee, which was one of the worst atrocities of the era. He can't forgive himself for what he did there and feels like he needs to report on his superior officers."

Doing so, however, gets Lucas into serious trouble. "Lucas is court-marshalled by his superior officer, Nathaniel, and hanged. Lucas' wife Elizabeth shoots one of the guys helping Nathaniel, and ends up being executed as well."

So, a bad day all round for the Wilson family – but things are about to get a lot weirder. "Lucas is hanged, his wife is killed, but it's not the end. He meets these two people, Lance and Jemma. They're Reapers and they work for Charon the Ferryman – AKA Death, who now sort of outsources! And they want him to be a Reaper too. They want him to join them. They can send Elizabeth's soul to Heaven and, when he's collected a certain number of souls, he can join her."

SCI-FI FOUNDATIONS

Cut to the present day, and things haven't gone quite as Lucas expected. He's still collecting souls and he absolutely hates it. "He's done so many more souls than he should have, because he's constantly getting infringements and having more added to his tally. He is the worst employee ever." Added to that is the fact that Lance has gone missing, and the Reapers are in open warfare with the Rogues – a faction who collect souls for Hell. And then Lucas discovers that Charon hasn't been entirely honest with him...

"Lucas meets a woman called Faith Jones, and he realises that she's Elizabeth. She looks like her, she sounds like her, she's her in every way. And he discovers that Elizabeth was never sent to Heaven, she has been reincarnated – several times over, in fact. Now, when you take a file and save it, that's your file. If you accidentally save something else over that, that mean's your file is gone. Elizabeth is gone, only Faith remains. But he goes on the run, trying to work out how to save her."

The story may sound very metaphysical, but Lee is keen to state that the book is science fiction, not fantasy. "The Rogues have wings, but they're kind of steampunk wings, while the Reapers have these skull canes that can be used to create inter-dimensional portals. It's all technology, not supernatural or magic."

Above: It's lovely Mr Tony Lee himself, author of *Also Known As*

Below: Charon, also known as Death, also known as "the manager you really wouldn't want to be working for".

FROM FILM TO COMIC

Also Known As didn't start out as a comic. The story and world was initially devised by screenwriter Andrew Nicholaou, who sold a movie script to UK production company BoxFly Pictures. Realising that they had something potentially huge on their hands, BoxFly began to look at broadening their options. Buzzwords like "trans-media" began to be bandied about. Soon they weren't just looking at a film, but also a comic and a game.

"I was doing a screenwriting class at Raindance [Film Festival], teaching screenwriters how to write graphic novels," says Lee. "BoxFly had a script. It was out, it was definitely in Hollywood. They had some notes, but they wanted to go >

the full trans-media route. So they went to the event looking for a writer to take the script and turn it into a graphic novel. While doing the day of talks, it came out that [producer] Haydn Pryce-Jenkins had turned up. At the end of the day we met for a drink."

Lee was sceptical about his chances of being hired for the project. "I'd spent an entire day telling people what to do as a lecturer and I kind of did the same thing here. There was something there, but it wasn't quite working. So I sat down and started saying, 'No, it can't be done like that. This has to happen and that has to happen and you can do this with that.' I thanked Haydn for my drink and went home."

A week later, however, Lee was contacted by his agent with an offer to rewrite the film. "I was hired to take on the script and rewrite it. It wasn't a page one rewrite, but it was a big job. The first draft was much more supernatural. My take was: 'It doesn't have to be that – it could be technology, but it's technology so advanced that humans can't even begin to comprehend it.'"

But isn't there a certain cynicism inherent in the idea of a trans-media enterprise? After all, just because you have a film script, that doesn't mean you should turn it into a comic. "The first thing I said to them was, 'Don't make a graphic novel just to help sell a screenplay.' I say that to all writers who have a screenplay. But I worked on the film and it was a good year after I'd taken it on before they raised the graphic novel idea again."

Lee's mind was changed when BoxFly sat him down and walked him through their plan for the franchise. "They'd been talking with games companies, they'd been talking with animation companies, they'd been talking with book companies – they'd really looked at the lot. So because of that, I felt a lot happier. Eventually I said, 'If you're going to do it, then do it now, because this is the perfect iteration of our story."

So, the *Also Known As* graphic novel tells a complete story, similar to that of the forthcoming movie but in a form designed specifically for the comics page. "When I was a kid, there were no DVDs or Blu-Rays – you had novelisations, and they always had extra little scenes. I kind of wanted this to be that – there's a few things that won't be in the film, as the screenplay has already changed. That's good. I'd like everything to be slightly different. The game will be different too."

MYTHS AND LEGENDS

Back to the story. "I kind of wanted to play with all my favourite things," says Lee. As a result *Also Known As* doesn't just feature Lucas and the Reapers (now *there's* a band name), but characters plucked from mythology too. "Lance the Reaper is actually Sir Lancelot. That's quite nice, because you get to think things like, 'OK, if Lancelot was in the real world, what would he be like a thousand years later?' He's not going to still be wearing armour, he'll be in three-piece suits. And it's quite a globetrotting take. This is a guy who can take a door – any door – and open a portal to anywhere in the world. There's one scene where we're running from New York to Sydney to Moscow to New Orleans and ending with Mardi Gras."

As if Lucas doesn't have enough to contend with, Lee promises a

This page: Lucas has been gathering souls for Charon for a century. The catch is, there's a rival outfit, the Rogues, doing the same for Charon's enemy Cerberus and dragging them to Hell instead

Above: By chance, Lucas discovers that everything he's been told is a lie. So now he's seeking the truth about Charon and Cerberus – and more importantly, the truth about where souls really go when they're gathered

> **"THESE PEOPLE ARE OLD, AND WHEN YOU'RE THAT OLD, HUMANS ARE JUST MAYFLIES"**

suitably deadly antagonist. "My favourite character is Thade, who's the enforcer for Charon. He's a complete psychopath and he gets all the best lines. I think there's a little bit of me being channelled into that – every time I got annoyed with something, it came out in Thade."

Lee describes Thade as middle-management, albeit of an especially nasty kind. "So you have Charon, who runs everything, and Thade is his enforcer. He just completely embodies Death. He looks like Jason Momoa and as far as he's concerned, he'll just kill his way through everyone. When Lucas decides he can't kill Faith, Thade's sent to do it. He doesn't care how many monkeys get in his way. These people are old, and when you're that old, humans are just mayflies."

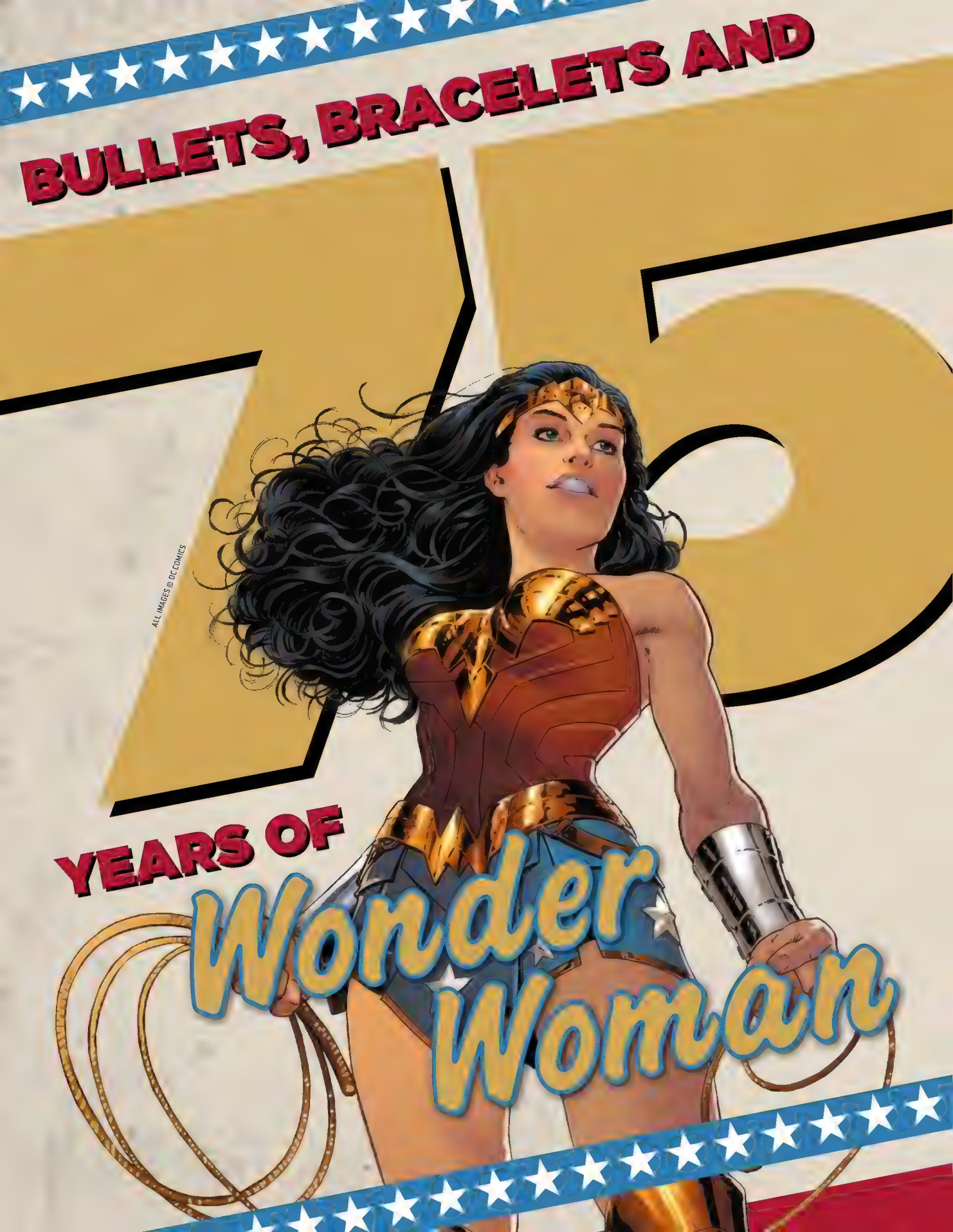
A LOVE OF COMICS

Old friends who first met at a *Doctor Who* convention, Lee's collaboration with Christopher Jones has been a long time coming. "We'd been playing around with an idea for a creator-owned project for a while. BoxFly asked me to suggest a couple of artists for this and I suggested Chris. He just got it immediately. He knocked it out of the park and his concept designs ended up being used in the adverts. They were that fully formed. And Charlie Kirchoff also knows Chris, and is absolutely brilliant."

With the colouring, Lee says he specifically didn't want "something bright and shiny and mainstream. We wanted something that played with the palette. The past is differently coloured. Lucas keeps getting these flashbacks and Charlie did those scenes differently, with a retro feel."

Despite a growing screenwriting career, Lee says that he will always have an enduring love for writing comics. "I was a reluctant reader – I hated books. But I got into comics at a young age," he says, remembering his brothers' collections of *2000 AD*, *Superman* and *Iron Man*. "Comics got me into reading stories and helped me understand how stories work. I've always had a love for them because they made me the writer I am now." CH

BULLETS, BRACELETS AND



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75 YEARS OF Wonder Woman

AS DIANA OF THEMYSCIRA ENTERS A NEW PHASE IN HER STORIED CAREER, **DAVID BARNETT** RAISES A TOAST TO THE EVER-AMAZING AMAZON...

Happy birthday to Wonder Woman! Diana of Themyscira, arguably the world's premier female superhero, turns 75 at the end of this year.

But while she might be as old as your granny, she isn't planning on swapping her Lasso of Truth and bulletproof bracelets for a bus pass and pension book just yet. Under the creative team of writer Greg Rucka and artists Nicola Scott and Liam Sharp, Wonder Woman has been given the Rebirth treatment by DC in her anniversary year – and it's excellent.

Rebirth, of course, is aiming to tidy up DC continuity once again, and with 75 years to go at with Wonder Woman, that's no mean feat. But with the title that debuted this summer, the new team are going all-out not only to reconcile the many variations of the character but also to make her more relevant for 2016 and beyond.

So what do we know about Wonder Woman? Well, she's a member of the race of super-powerful women from Greek myth, the Amazons, who have lived in splendid isolation since ancient times on what was initially named in the comics Paradise Island, but in recent iterations has been given the more classical-sounding appellation Themyscira.

The long-standing origin of Diana was that she was fashioned out of clay by Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, who wanted a daughter of her own. Given that Themyscira was cut off from the "world of men," the... uh, usual methods of achieving this were out of the question, which is why Hippolyta took the golem route and persuaded the gods of Olympus to breathe life into her clay-baby, who went on to enter the world of men as a sort of Amazonian ambassador, hiding in plain sight under the secret identity of Diana Prince.

DIVINE REBOOT

DC's New 52 reboot in 2011 attempted to streamline this by revealing this legend as a lie spun to keep Diana safe from harm; apparently she *was* created by the usual methods, when Hippolyta encountered a man on Themyscira who, post-coitus, was revealed to be none other than Zeus on one of his many booty-call missions from Mount Olympus. (At least he had the good grace to appear to Hippolyta as a man – poor old Leda didn't have it so good when the randy old father of the gods turned up on her doorstep as a swan.) If she was a child of Zeus, and therefore a demigod, Diana's super-powers were more satisfyingly explained, but she was also in mortal danger from Zeus's enemies, hence the deception.

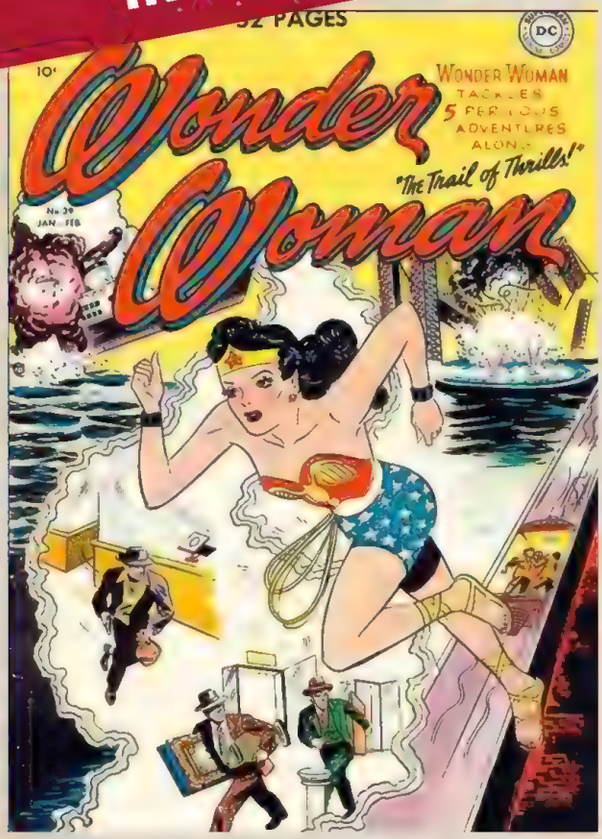
Opposite: The latest interpretation of the iconic Wonder Woman.

And now we're into Rebirth, which doesn't sweep away all that went before as New 52 did but tries to reconcile the twisted, knotted timelines of earlier variations of the DC Universe. And Greg Rucka is making hay with that, having Diana aware of the discrepancies in her own history and trying to track down the truth, part of which is that she discovers Hippolyta didn't just give birth to her, but also a male twin, Jason...

Which is where we are now, and what a long journey it's been since Wonder Woman debuted in the pages of *All Star Comics #8* in December 1941, in a backup story written by her creator, William Moulton Marston. >

"REBIRTH TRIES TO RECONCILE THE TWISTED, KNOTTED TIMELINES"

> "I WAS ALWAYS AWARE OF HER, IN THE SAME WAY AS SUPERMAN"



Diana's publication history is well-documented but fascinating and worth a very brief recap here.

Marston was an academic psychologist and lawyer who tirelessly promoted himself as "inventor of the lie detector" (which was half true, and his efforts certainly helped popularise its use). Max Gaines, the publisher of the two comics companies that would join to become DC Comics, read an interview with Marston in which the psychologist talked about comic books and how he didn't believe they were fulfilling their potential, so Gaines promptly hired him.

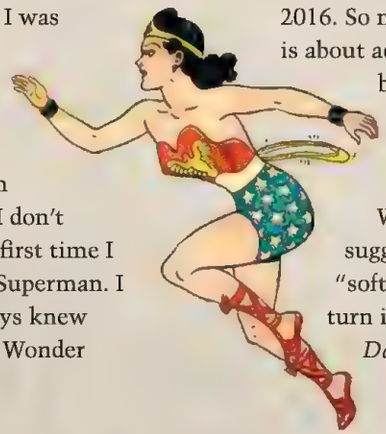
Marston's wife Elizabeth – and Olive Byrne, who lived with the unconventional couple in a polyamorous relationship – should get a lot of credit for Marston's creation of Wonder Woman; it was she who suggested that his idea of a super-hero who didn't solve problems with his fists but through the medium of "love" should be a woman. Marston had come to the conclusion during his polygraph research that, essentially, women were often more honest than men, and he fed this into Wonder Woman. Hence her Lariat of Hestia, or Lasso of Truth, which when bound around men compels them to tell things as they really are.

Above: Wonder Woman's creator, William Moulton Marston, explicitly designed her as an antidote to what he called "the comics' worst offence," their "blood-curdling masculinity."

CULTURAL ICON

Three-quarters of a century on, Greg Rucka is basically taking the same approach with Wonder Woman that Marston did when he created her, with perhaps one slight difference: although Wonder Woman is still about love and truth, she can kick ass with the best of them.

Rucka was born in San Francisco and when he was a kid in the '70s Wonder Woman was as much a part of his – and the nation's – psyche as Batman and Superman. "Gender never entered into it," he says. "When I was a little kid watching the Super Friends cartoon on Saturday mornings and then playing with my friends I'm pretty sure I 'was' Wonder Woman as many times as I was Superman. Speaking as an American, I was always aware of her, in the same way I don't remember the first time I learned about Superman. I feel like I always knew Superman and Wonder Woman." He laughs and adds, "When you're really young you do this equivalency thing, and when I was four years old or so I think I just assumed that Superman and Wonder Woman were married."



Wonder Woman is part of that triumvirate of superheroes that even people who have never picked up a comic book in their lives are aware of through cultural osmosis, along with Batman and Superman – possibly thanks in part to the '70s TV series starring Linda Carter. However, Rucka says, "Diana is unique because of what she represents. With Batman, it's fighting crime. With Superman, it's 'truth, justice and the American way'. While Diana had a thumb in both of those, what she really represents is love."

But, traditionally, don't we want our superheroes to leap tall buildings in a single bound, to strike terror into the hearts of evil-doers, to punch their way to triumph and victory?

"Maybe on some level some people see a superhero who represents 'love' as problematic," shrugs Rucka. "Maybe it seems soft. But look at what people do for love. It can be quite brutal. What makes Diana so unique is her empathy and understanding, and god knows we need that in 2016. So much of superhero comics is about action and violence and blowing stuff up. Here's a character who promotes understanding and tolerance."

Which by no means suggests that Diana is the "soft option". Look at her turn in *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*, portrayed

by Gal Gadot, who is reprising her role for Wonder Woman's first ever big screen outing in summer 2017. When she finally shows up in the movie, looking like the tremendous and terrifying Amazon warrior that she is, the two headline heroes are as disparaging about Diana as anyone can be. "Is she with you?" asks Batman. "I thought she was with you," says Superman. But this little bit of bro bonding is quickly put down when Wonder Woman hauls off and kicks ass.

"I would say she can kick more ass than Batman and Superman!" says Rucka. "Of the three of them, Diana is the one I really wouldn't want to get into a fight with."

Right: In the '60s, like most of DC's line, Wonder Woman was subject to a lot of experimentation – some said confusion – and in the '70s, she was even stripped of her powers for a while, swapped her costume for a leather jumpsuit and became a kind of Emma Peel character.. The latest series is wisely glossing over that phase.

TAKING CHARGE

The Rebirth title isn't the first time Rucka has written Wonder Woman – he did 30-odd issues of her title between 2003 and 2006, as well as his first outing with the character in 2002's original graphic novel, *The Hiketeia*. It's fair to say Rucka is protective of the character. In summer the variant cover artist for the Rebirth series, Frank Cho, walked off the title after a reported disagreement with Rucka over Cho's covers showing too much flesh and cleavage.

"I had the privilege of writing Diana in 2003 and I worked for DC until 2009, when I stepped away for a variety of reasons. They invited me back for the Rebirth series," says Rucka. "There are maybe three hooks that DC can bait which are guaranteed to get me, and Diana is the best bait they could have put out there.

"Rebirth is not a reboot, which can be a dangerous word in comic books. This is an attempt to bring a fresh look but honour what's gone before. The best comic writing of the last 10 or 15 years has honoured the legacy of the characters it's dealing with but looked towards the future."

Honouring the past can be fraught with difficulties with old characters, and Wonder Woman is no exception. Her very early appearances 75 years ago saw her in a variety of bound-and-gagged "damsel in distress" scenarios – William Moulton Marston was apparently something of a fan of bondage and submission.

Then there are the props and gimmicks... Why would anyone who is generally confined to a hidden island need a jet plane, much less an invisible one? And dare we even mention one of Diana's sometime enemies of the '60s, Egg Fu, the gigantic Chinese sentient egg?

"Some aspects just ain't gonna work," laughs Rucka. "I mean, Egg Fu... Sometimes you've just got to say, we're going to have to just leave this out >

by the bins. And you've got to look at how the readership has changed. What worked for people 50 years ago isn't necessarily going to work today."

Readers today, of course, expect more. They want more diversity, more voices, more representation of groups that have perhaps previously been marginalised. Rucka treads carefully here, but the Rebirth title reveals some fairly solid clues as to what sort of relationships might form on an island populated entirely by women. In flashbacks to Diana's time on Themyscira, we see other Amazons talking in reverent, complimentary tones as she emerges naked from a pool, and there are references to her possible relationships. "I thought she and Kasia...," gossips one character. "And Meghara and Evrayle... I don't even know."

Above: The new series begins by tackling the contradictions in past origin stories head-on.

Opposite: Issue 1 cover by Liam Sharp

RINGING THE CHANGES

As Rucka says, the needs and demands of the readership have changed since Wonder Woman was first created.

"The best Wonder Woman stories are not about whether she's going to win the fight," says Rucka. "We already know she can throw tanks around. They're about the characters and the sacrifices they are about to make on our behalf so that they can win those fights. These characters might appear to be unbreakable but they're not, because they have hearts, and hearts can break."

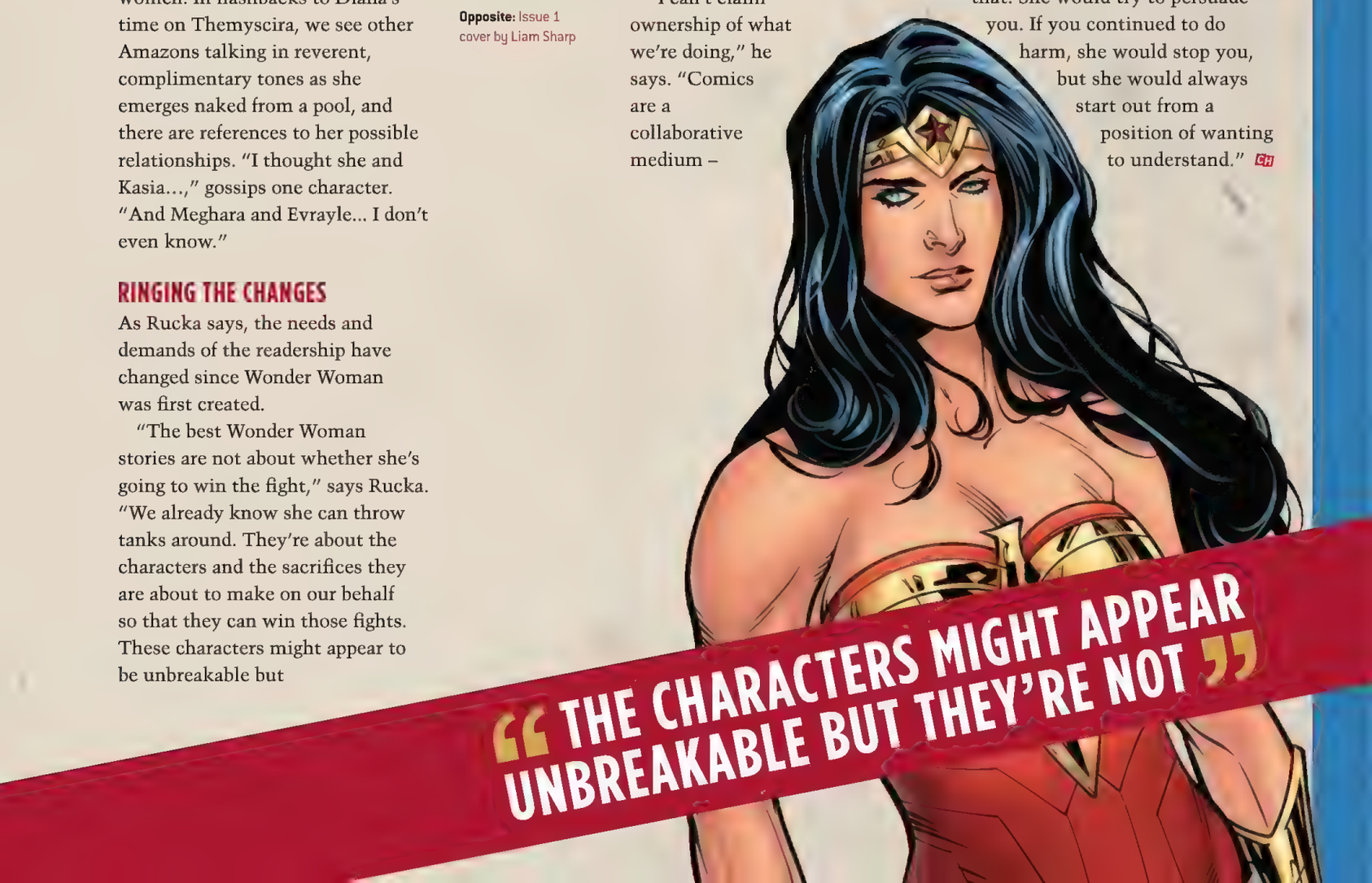
The Rebirth Wonder Woman is certainly a good-looking book, and has an unorthodox concept – alternating issues charting two parallel stories, both written by Rucka but each with a different art team: Nicola Scott is illustrating the "Year One" issues which chart Diana's first meeting with long-time love interest Steve Trevor, while Liam Sharp handles "The Lies", in which Wonder Woman searches for the truth of her origins. Colours from Romulo Fajardo Jr and Laura Martin, plus lettering by Jodi Wynne really make the visuals sing, and Rucka has the highest praise for the team.

"I can't claim ownership of what we're doing," he says. "Comics are a collaborative medium – and mine have to be because I can't draw! I'm privileged to be working with creators who are among the very best in the medium today."

Together they're taking a 75-year-old legacy character and trying to make her relevant for the 21st Century. Is that possible with a superhero created in 1941?

"I'd say Wonder Woman has never been more relevant than she is today," says Rucka. "You've seen it in the UK with Brexit, we're seeing it in the US with the Trump campaign... It seems that people don't want to understand each other sometimes, and I don't want to hear these people any more, I want to tune them out.

"But Diana would never do that. She would try to persuade you. If you continued to do harm, she would stop you, but she would always start out from a position of wanting to understand." CH



"THE CHARACTERS MIGHT APPEAR UNBREAKABLE BUT THEY'RE NOT"

THE DRUGS DON'T WORK

ABIGAIL CHANDLER TALKS TO KAREN BERGER AND SARA KENNEY ABOUT THEIR NEW "ANTIBIOTIC APOCALYPSE" THRILLER, **SURGEON X**

Antibiotics are, for the most part, something that we take for granted these days. But one of the most frightening predictions for the near future is that they may eventually stop working...

Surgeon X is a new series from Image Comics edited by former Vertigo Executive Editor Karen Berger and written by newcomer Sara Kenney, with funding from charitable organisation The Wellcome Trust (which funds projects with a focus on medicine). It paints a grim portrait of a world that has been torn apart by just such a crisis. It's 2036 and the drugs don't work, with the few that do reserved for the rich and powerful... The titular character, Rosa, is a "vigilante surgeon who hacks the system" and heads out to save the lives of those who truly deserve it, says Berger. She "eventually evolves – or even devolves – and gets this sort of God complex very much like Walter White does in *Breaking Bad*... She's so good at saving lives that she really lets it go to her head. She will decide who will live and who will die."

The idea came to Kenney in its earliest form 10 years ago, as a potential Future Shock for *2000 AD*, which she never actually submitted. "I just never felt brave enough. I never pursued it until now," she says. Kenney spent the next 10 years establishing herself as a documentary maker (while also working on Gamadrv and releasing an animated film she scripted, *Angels* >

Quick-- out of the van Move, move, move!
Come on, Lewis, hustle!
Gonna be tough finding Mai in this fucking mess.
I've been having this recurring dream, or should I say nightmare
I'm drowning but I can't move
I get a glimpse of what it must have felt like for Mum.

“‘YOU’RE NOT BEING EXTREME ENOUGH,’ THEY SAID. ‘THIS TYPE OF THING COULD BE MUCH WORSE’”

& Ghosts), but the idea never really left her. And after working with The Wellcome Trust on previous projects, she realised that they could provide her with the funding she needed to get the comic off the ground.

MENTORS AND PATRONS

There was only one problem: she'd never written a comic before. Realising that she'd need help, she went looking for a mentor and editor. “I started at the top with Karen Berger, thinking I'll work my way down after that,” Kenney laughs, still amazed that the editor of *Sandman*, *Preacher*, *Hellblazer* and many more would agree to work with her. Berger remembers how Kenney approached her “on LinkedIn of all places... I could tell from her writing that she was a good person to take a chance on, and I said, 'Listen, even if you don't get the grant, I'd love to work with you on this'.” Berger says that there was just “something very fresh and original about the idea”.

Despite having worked with The Wellcome Trust before, Kenney still had to go through a lengthy application process for the grant. After going through a couple of preliminary stages and making sure she had the right team of advisors on board, she had to pitch her idea. “You have to go in and sit in this big wooden-panelled room and there's about 15 people sitting around the table – scientists, all different types of experts,” she explains. “They were really nice and really friendly and really encouraging, but you then have to pitch... And we got it. It was the only project to get full funding.”

This isn't the first time the Trust has funded something that's a little bit out there. “They fund weird stuff. They funded a series of lectures on zombies,” Kenney tells us, while singing the praises of her

Mum sacrificed her life for others.
Worked in places most feared to tread.
Searching for new antibiotics, to help millions of people.
She never gave up on the human race. She believed we are worth saving-- that's something I struggle with at times.
Dominic, thank God you're alive. No major trauma, but looks like second degree burns.
Huh... who's there?
It's Rosa, Rosa Scott.
Rosa! What are you doing here?

"modern day patrons". Even so, it's still pretty rare that something like a comic is funded by a Trust that specialises in science. "You have to take the science seriously," Kenney agrees. Luckily, she definitely does.

"I kind of like to get things right," she says. "I love working with scientists, I love the way that they can inspire you and I love the way that they can send you off in really weird and unusual directions – you can get really unexpected results from that." For Berger the most interesting thing about working with a team of advisors – not just doctors, but everyone from philosophers to people who study history and humanities – was the way they pushed the story. "[They were] saying 'Hey, you're not being extreme enough. This type of thing could be much worse'." What they mean by "this type of thing" is doctors finding themselves unable to treat even the simplest infection or carry out surgery without a huge risk of post-operative infection. So, while this is a near-future world featuring amazing leaps in medical technology, it's also up against the most "antiquated" problems, Berger explains.

But Kenney wasn't just interested in the science of it – *Surgeon X* also looks at the inequalities inherent in healthcare. "In this country we live into our 80s but in other countries life expectancy is only into your 50s – there's a massive disparity," Kenney says. "And so between countries and within countries you have this disparity. A lot of the very poor also have ill health... So there's loads of these inequalities and I think when we develop our technology for medicine and science we should be developing our philosophy and our ethics as well."

Above: The story of *Surgeon X* begins with a crisis "set against the backdrop of an antibiotic apocalypse in near-future London."

Those inequalities are clear in the characters of *Surgeon X*. Rosa, the protagonist, is according to Kenney "the darling of the NHS," but her father is a social-climbing doctor in the private sector. Her >

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Ssshh, no time to explain. Let me get a better look.
Ahhhh, it hurts... what's that?
Now keep still, these regen patches will fix you up fast.
Need you alive to win this election or else we are all up shit creek.
Mambalginin, straight from Beijing. Still in trials here, but it works.
You're giving me illegal drugs? Made from snake venom?!
They're safe and will get you sorted. Now stay with me, Dominic.
My twin sister is definitely more like my Mum. Wants to save the world.

sister Martha, meanwhile, is a microbiologist ("the person who could save millions of lives, whereas Rosa saves one life at a time") and Rosa's schizophrenic half-brother is trying to work out what is real and what isn't in a world that's going mad. Rosa is determined to protect her sister from people for whom a microbiologist is a valuable commodity, but she has her own enemies to contend with.

SCIENCE AND ART

For Kenney, writing Rosa as an antihero was a given. "I just think having that unpredictability in that character makes it more interesting. But also you need a journey for your character to go on. You want to see them change... [Rosa's] followed the rules, done what's been asked of her, and she's got to the point where the NHS is crumbling, society is crumbling and she can't toe the line anymore. She has to do things her way." Kenney was also determined to have "lots of strong women in the story because that's what I'm surrounded by, at work [and] my friends who work in different types of science."

> **"SOCIETY IS CRUMBLING AND SHE CAN'T TOE THE LINE ANYMORE"**

Above: Driven and rebellious, Rosa uses experimental surgery and black-market drugs to treat patients... if she finds them deserving.

Writing *Surgeon X* wasn't just about getting a great editor on board – Kenney also needed a team of advisors, a marketing team, a digital team for the app that goes alongside it and – of course – an artist. John Watkiss came on board at Karen Berger's suggestion. She calls him "a master artist. We're really lucky to have him. He also taught anatomy at the Royal College for a couple of years, so it's great to have, in a comic that deals with medicine, someone who really

People say I'm more like my Dad--yeah, we're both surgeons happy to save one patient at a time.
Doctor, come quick-- my husband is dying!
Help him, please!
Obasanjo will be fine, now get over here!

This patient is my priority.
I'm sorry, I can't help him.
What, why not? My God - what kind of doctor are you?
Just who the hell do you think you are?
But perhaps not all of us deserve to be saved.

knows the human body well, in terms of how to draw it."

Well known as a fine artist who has produced concept art for film and TV, Watkiss is also a comic artist who has worked on the likes of *Sandman* and *Deadman*. And handily for Kenney, he happened to live locally to her. "I really liked the idea of being able to sit in the pub and talk about an idea over a pint with somebody," she says. "And I think that was really important to me because it was my first comic, to have those conversations and have that interaction with the artist."

Above: Rosa comes to believe that "life is a privilege, not a right. The far-right government have the same attitude but Rosa differs over who is deserving of that privilege...

Having worked digitally and in documentaries before, Kenney was perhaps more at ease when working on the app features that accompany the comic. Berger calls her "a quick study" when it comes to learning the ropes of comic book writing, and Berger enjoyed the chance to get back to basics and be "very hands-on" with one comic rather than overseeing dozens as the Executive Editor of Vertigo. "I love comics and it's great to be back, and it's great to really just give 100% to *Surgeon X* because we've created this whole big world and it's a lot of work. But it's fun work," she adds quickly, smiling.

Kenney calls working with Berger "a masterclass – you just want to soak it all up" and is proud of the skills she's learned as a comic writer in 18 months. "When you're writing for comics you have to be very precise, you have to tell a story economically and you have to think very carefully about how you set up mystery, how you portray your characters and how you keep the logic working throughout the story. The logic of the story world needs to be robust, but without the luxury of the number of words you have in a television programme. So hats off to all the comic creators out there!"

Surgeon X is beginning with a single arc, but that's not the end. "There's more to come," Kenney promises. "This isn't the end of *Surgeon X*, just this series. I have so many story ideas for this... There's a lot more to come from Rosa and her eccentric family and the world. We're just seeing the beginning of this world." Assuming anyone survives, of course... CH

SURGEON X: THE APP

IT'S ABOUT ENHANCING THE STORY WORLD, NOT JUST PUTTING COMICS ON-SCREEN

The Wellcome Trust is drawn to innovative projects, and for *Surgeon X* that innovation came in the form of the app that accompanies the comic.

Kenney knew from the beginning that "no-one wants to see the panels come to life." For her, the app is solely intended to "enhance the story world" via adverts from within the *Surgeon X* universe, party political broadcasts from the Lionheart Party (the governing party in *Surgeon X*), animated infographics explaining the events leading up to the comic, and filmed interviews with experts explaining the science and reasoning behind particular story points. The app is so unique that no existing platform could support what Kenney needed it to be able to do. So she and her digital team built one from scratch.

For Berger, the app was one of the big selling points for her. She describes it as "an immersive storytelling experience," but isn't convinced that it's something all comics will do in the future. "It's really expensive to do," she explains. "That's why people don't do it. And the big companies who can really afford to do it, their interests really are just getting the regular comics out, doing what they know. Which is fine – they can afford to take the chances but they kind of stick to feeding the beast." That said, Berger is adamant that "comics in its purest sense is what it is. It's words and pictures on paper, or digitally... It all starts with the comic."

WILD AT HEART

Joel Meadows meets the creators behind **Young Animal**, DC's new young adult comics line

The latest DC Comics imprint, Young Animal, launches this autumn with a quartet of new titles: *Shade, The Changing Girl*; the eccentrically-titled *Cave Carson Has A Cybernetic Eye*; *Mother Panic*; and – just out – a brand new run of weird super-book, *Doom Patrol*.

It's not the first spin-off imprint in the company's long history, of course. There's Vertigo, pre-eminently, which launched back in 1993 and became the home of hits like *The Sandman* and *Preacher*. Sci-fi label Helix, on the other hand, was less successful. That and the Impact Comics line, targeting younger readers, both came and went within just two years.

Initially Young Animal looked suspiciously similar to Vertigo, sparking fears that the perennial mature readers imprint may be being phased out. But as more info has been released it's become clear that the label is very much its own (young) animal. Headed up by celebrated *Umbrella Academy* creator Gerard Way (interviewed on page 70), it's designed to sit somewhere between the regular DC range and its more goth sibling.

Way has gathered an impressive line-up of creators together from the worlds of independent and mainstream comics. For *Mother Panic*, Way has been collaborating with writer Jody Houser, whose CV includes *Faith* for Valiant, *Orphan Black* for IDW and *Agent May* for Marvel. She told us that working on a series set in one of the comic world's most well-known fictional settings – Gotham City – was anything but restrictive.

Cave Carson variant covers by Matt Wagner (this page) and Bill Sienkiewicz (opposite).

"Actually, when working with a brand new character like Violet Paige, having a familiar setting like Gotham helps ground her and make her feel like part of a larger universe. There are certain things you can't get away with in Gotham if you don't want to get nailed by the Bat crew, so putting an angry, violent young woman in the middle of that world and figuring out how it all works is a lot of fun."

GOTHAM MOM

The book will feature rotating artists including Tommy Lee Edwards, John Paul Leon and Shawn Crystal, and Houser says she's excited by this prospect. "I've mostly just been watching Tommy's art come in and jumping up and down. He's a brilliant artist and it's an honour to

Mother Panic #1, written by Jody Houser with art by Tommy Lee Edwards.

Shade, The Changing Girl variant cover by Tula Lotay. More from her on page 130.

IMAGES © DC COMICS.

work with him, especially considering that Violet is partially his creation."

The comic tells the story of a wealthy-celebutante-turned-vigilante who sets out on a mission of revenge against the Gotham elite who turned her into a monster, but the writer is keen to emphasise that this is a different sort of vigilante tale from any that we might have seen before in the regular Bat-books.

"I joke that what makes Violet different is that she's not an orphan, but the fact is, her relationship with her mother is a core part of her life and of the book," Houser explains. "Caring for an ailing parent is difficult for anyone, let alone someone running around in a costume. And it definitely gives us a chance to see a softer side of Violet."

Lead artist Tommy Lee Edwards is a creator with a long career and a very impressive following. "Gerard and I wanted to work together, and began to seriously make plans to do so during last year's NC Comicon. We tossed around a few ideas before settling on Mother Panic, which is based on a character Gerard had sketched out a ways back as a potential creator-owned title. Gerard thought that this character would work perfectly in the DC Universe – specifically Gotham City – so we started fleshing out what her story could be."

The idea of rotating artists came about through pragmatism, says Edwards. "I put too much work into the pencils, inks and colours to illustrate 22 pages a month. I haven't drawn a monthly book in many years, so my plan was to work around my film and animation projects to set up the world of Mother Panic and do as much as realistically possible. I've fallen in love with the character, so it's very hard to let go here and there," he admits.

Edwards worked closely with Houser and Way on the book: "Once Gerard and I had basically locked in Mother Panic's visual design and origin story, Jody was brought on board to give our main character a voice. Jody worked with Gerard and DC to lay out several character and story arcs while I chipped away at the character designs, the

"WHAT MAKES VIOLET DIFFERENT IS THAT SHE'S NOT AN ORPHAN"

environments, MP's hideout, her glider, helmet and costumes. Once I get a script from Jody," concludes Edwards, "I give story revision suggestions and tend to go off and do my own thing with the action and layout. It's a tight collaborative team – Gerard, Jody, John Workman, and me. We all talk pretty much every day and help inspire each other."

Cave Carson Has A Cybernetic Eye stars the relatively obscure DC character who first appeared in *Brave & The Bold* #31 back in 1960. It's co-written by Way and Jon Rivera, creator of the two *Heartbreak* graphic novels and a TV concept artist for over a decade.

"Gerard and I have been friends for a very long time," says Rivera. "In the very early days of Young Animal, I came on as a consultant, but we quickly found ourselves focusing on *Cave*. Gerard wanted me to co-write it with him, and of course I accepted. Seeing as this would be my first mainstream comic work, I gave a writing sample to Shelly Bond. Shelly was part of a movement in comics that led me to art school in the first place, where Gerard and I met. The fact that Shelly liked my sample and supported the decision to hire me was a very special moment in my life, and here I am."

CAVE DAD

Despite its legacy, *Cave Carson Has A Cybernetic Eye* takes its main influence from outside of comics. "The first night that Gerard showed me samples of *Cave Carson*," Rivera says, "I began to think of Wes Anderson's *The Life Aquatic*, one of my favourite films. There are the obvious comparisons: the jumpsuits, nostalgia for an age of adventure and discovery, life not working out as planned, etc. Those themes began to mix with the fact that Cave Carson never really found an audience, and most people don't spend their days wondering what's inside the Earth other than oil and diamonds. Once our initial inspirations mixed around we were left with the idea of Cave Carson as a flawed sort of has-been – a hero whose time has passed. It's then that we began to see him as a human being, and that's where you should always begin.

Doom Patrol by Gerard Way and Nick Derington blends the new with the best of the old.

"We soon fell in love with the idea of Cave being an emotionally distant man who only cares about minerals and having a teenage daughter. They love each other as family, but Chloe wasn't interested in the 'family business', and that caused a great distance between them. But something from Cave's past has come back, and it will take both of them to stop it."

Young Animal will feature two books with a concrete link to Vertigo: *Doom Patrol* (of which more on the next page) and *Shade, The Changing Girl*. The latter has young adult novelist Cecil Castellucci at its helm, alongside artist Marley Zarcone. The series touches on issues of gender, just as Pete Milligan's *Shade, The Changing Man* did.

"Honestly, I don't think that you can write about Shade and the idea of an alien possessing a human body and not touch on gender at points," says Castellucci. "Because what is human gender to an alien? How that unfolds and how I get to fully explore that obviously depends on our run. Our Shade is going to be different than Milligan (or Ditko's) Shade and I think it's important when rebooting to forge your own way. I love so much of what Milligan touched on with Rac Shade. His whole run inspires me. But suffice it to say, I have ideas and plans about that."

Castellucci has relished working closely with Zarcone on the new title. "We talk all the time on email and have a little shorthand for each other. We email and text. We have a secret Pinterest board for madness images so we can have a little visual vocabulary. The pages that she sends take my breath away. The detail and the nuances that she puts on the page and they way she pushes the madness is extraordinary. I find that I am trying to write my scripts and kick up my own level of craft to keep up with her. She pushes me to be braver on the page. I find that is the best kind of working relationship, where you want to do great for the other person because they are so fantastic."

TURN OVER TO READ OUR EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH YOUNG ANIMAL HEAD HONCHO GERARD WAY...

Doom Patrol is out now, and the other Young Animal titles roll out throughout October.

BOOM!
EMT
UNIT 1-2, THIS IS DISPATCH. IT'S A LOVELY NIGHT FOR STARGAZING, BUT WE'VE GOT A PEDESTRIAN INVOLVED IN A HIT AND RUN--!
WOW.
LET'S GO--!

THE MAN WITH THE PLAN

The Umbrella Academy author **Gerard Way** tells **Stephen Jewell** about taking charge of **Young Animal**...

While the rest of the world may know Gerard Way best for his day-job – fronting legendary (and sadly now defunct) emo-rock band My Chemical Romance – comics fans will know that he has forged an impressive second career as a writer.

A comics fan from a young age, he interned for DC and scripted indie book *On Raven's Wings* when he was just 16 (it was axed after the first issue when the art team quit).

But it was with 2007's superb mini-series *The Umbrella Academy* (with Gabriel Ba) that he really broke through. The book was a significant hit for publisher Dark Horse, and Way followed it up a few years later with *The True Lives Of The Fabulous Killjoys* (co-created with Shaun Simon and Becky Cloonan).

Now the Los Angeles based author has launched DC's new venture, Young Animal. And while Way will fly solo on *Doom Patrol*, he is co-scripting *Cave Carson Has A Cybernetic Eye* with his old pal Jon Rivera, and has co-created *Mother Panic* with the book's regular team of Jody Houser and Tommy Lee Edwards, as well as acting as a consultant on Cecil Castellucci and Marley Zarcone's *Shade, The Changing Girl*. A busy guy, then, but he found time to chat to *Comic Heroes* about the new imprint.

Gerard Way is a graduate of New York's respected School of Visual Arts

Comic Heroes: How did you first become involved with Young Animal?

Gerard Way: I'd been a fan of DC and Vertigo for a very long time. I re-entered the world of comics with *Umbrella Academy* and it did really well, so I was able to establish myself not as a musician coming into comics but as an actual comics creator. Right around that time when the first *Umbrella Academy* graphic novel had come out, I started talking to [former Vertigo executive editor] Shelly Bond, and for years we kept trying to see what kind of project we could do together, but it was never really the right time. Then after I'd done my solo record, I wanted a new challenge and wanted to come back into comics. But not simply to write a book – I wanted to try to do something a little different and to see if I could actually build something...

CH: It was Jim Lee who suggested >

Babs Tarr's cover for DC's premier Young Animal title *Doom Patrol #1*.

DC describes *Doom Patrol* as "a blenderized reimagining of the ultimate series of the strange".

IMAGES © DC COMICS

that you should head up your own special line of books, correct?

GW: Yes, and that really appealed to me as it meant that I could come up with lots of ideas and different – indeed, contrasting – concepts for these books that still felt like they were part of a family. That was really exciting, as I got to go through the old archives of characters, to try and find some oddball characters. But more and more as I worked on it, it felt like it needed to be its own imprint, as it had been a long time since Vertigo had actually done DC characters. It had the legacy of that, but it also had a newer legacy of creator-owned books, and that's where Vertigo is now, so it didn't make sense to bring DC Universe characters back to Vertigo. It made sense to create something new that was actually on the fringe of the current DC Universe, and that's what Young Animal is.

CH: Did you always intend to write *Doom Patrol* yourself?

GW: I knew that if I was going to do something with DC then I wanted to write *Doom Patrol*. But it's really a nod to the entire run of *Doom Patrol*, although the runs that inspired me the most were Grant Morrison's and Rachel Pollack's, which were also in the '90s.

CH: You're a big fan of Grant Morrison – he even appeared in a My Chemical Romance video – so was it important for your version of *Doom Patrol* to stand apart from what he did?

GW: I've spent a lot of time preparing for *Doom Patrol*, doing research and a lot of

> "I'VE SPENT A LOT OF TIME PREPARING FOR DOOM PATROL"

And every second behind the wheel stands in the way of the five words I hate saying:
"We tried everything we could."
CAGEY, WE'VE BEEN WORKING TOGETHER, LIKE, WHAT? THREE WEEKS?
YEAH, SAM, SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
YOU GOTTA MEET MY SON, LUCIUS--HE'S WEIRD LIKE YOU.
I'M WEIRD?
OH YEAH, YOU'RE WEIRD, COMING IN HERE DRIVING LIKE THAT, SPINNING ALL KINDS OF CRAZY NONSENSE, LIKE THAT STORY YOU TOLD ME ABOUT YOUR HIGH SCHOOL PROM...
WE WERE ATTACKED BY PHANTAHAWKS AND MY DATE TURNED INTO A POOL OF LAVENDER MEMBRANE
EXACTLY WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT RIGHT THERE. IT'S COOL, THOUGH...
...MY SON IS COOL. HE'S REALLY INTO HEAVY METAL, LOVES SKATEBOARDING-- JUST A LITTLE OUT THERE FOR SOME PEOPLE
BUT... I'M ALL HE'S GOT.
VECTOR DAMAGE CRITICAL--
SPACE CASE--
EMT
WHAT ABOUT HIS MOM?

Nick Derington's comics credits include *Catwoman* and *X-Men Unlimited*.

Fegredo cover for the second Young Animal title, *Shade, The Changing Girl*.

notes about what was going to be in my take. At the very start of it, it absolutely felt like it was just a tribute piece, and that I was literally picking up from the '90s and starting again. But as I got deeper into it, I decided to go into all the Doom Patrols, such as Keith Giffen's [2009] run. We're also going to go back to the original '60s Doom Patrol, which was probably the biggest influence on *Umbrella Academy* – a lot of the storytelling devices are very similar. So then the challenge was to work out how to honour this entire legacy, and how do I work all of this stuff into it in a way that will also set me free to do my own thing?

CH: How did Nick Derington end up drawing the series?

GW: Nick was somebody who had been out of comics for almost a decade, working in animation and things like that. Then Shelly Bond just thought of him, and showed me his art, which I really liked. She then asked him if he was interested in *Doom Patrol*, so he did this drawing of Cliff Steele (Robotman) sitting on a couch, which I really loved, as it just had this energy.

CH: Meanwhile, you're collaborating on *Cave Carson Has a Cybernetic Eye* with co-writer Jon Rivera (*Boxer Comix*) and *Powers* artist Michael Avon Oeming...

GW: Jon and I have been friends since meeting at art school, and we've developed a few TV projects together over the years, so have similar sensibilities. With *Cave Carson*, I knew that he would bring a different perspective, as well as the right energy. With Mike, I've been a fan of his art for a really long time, and it felt like this would be a really cool chance for him to do something different with this kind of old-school character. And it takes place underground in lots of caves, and Mike is so great at shadow, mood and setting.

CH: What does the future hold for Young Animal? Are you planning to eventually add more titles?

GW: We're going to concentrate on the existing four books for now, but we're always talking about what the next group of books could be and whether we'll add them one by one, or perhaps it'll be another entirely new group of books. The idea is to not expand too rapidly because we want to make sure that the four core books are doing what they're meant to be doing. But there should also be the opportunity to do some one-off projects like a psychedelic special that we'll print in black light ink, and maybe we'll experiment with using old art to tell new stories.

CH: The second *Umbrella Academy* book, *Dallas*, was published in 2008 but you're also finally working on a follow-up with artist Gabriel Ba...

GW: Gabriel is drawing the second issue at the moment, and the script for the third issue is due soon. It's going a little slower than we'd like, but it's definitely happening, and we're working on it!

TURN AND FACE THE STRANGE

WILL SALMON CHARTS THE HISTORY OF THE DOOM PATROL, DC'S ANSWER TO THE X-MEN...

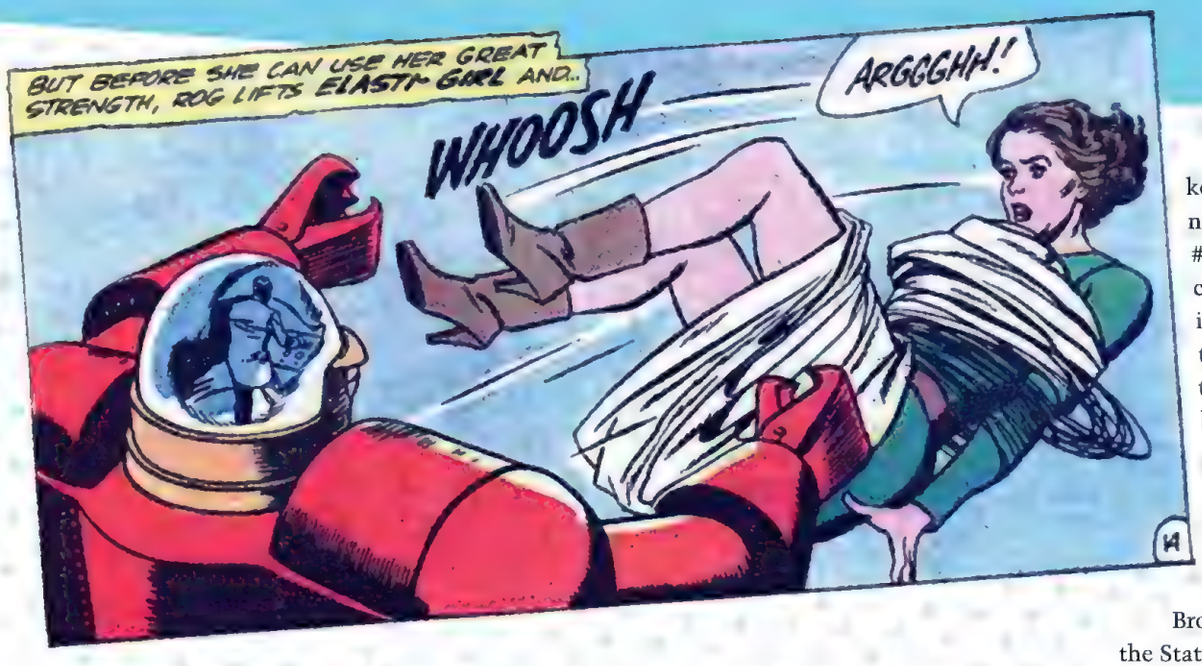
SUNNUVA!
EXPEDITE. VERB TO SPEED THE PROCESS OF. FACILITATE.
DONE.
THAT'S TWICE HE'S BLINDSIDED US! WHY ARE WE HUMORING HIM!?
NOW!? YOU ASK THAT NOW!?
SEE? WHAT DID I TELL YOU? THE "S" IS FOR SSSSSUCTIO--
WE AIN'T NO GODDAMN SINGULARITY!
YOUR LIPS TO AN...

ALL IMAGES © DC COMICS

"REBORN OUT OF DISASTER, FOUR SURVIVORS ROSE AGAIN TO FORM A LEGION OF THE WORLD'S STRANGEST HEROES!"

Those words emblazoned on the cover of *My Greatest Adventure #80* heralded the arrival of a super-team like no other (well, perhaps *one* other...). They're very rarely trumpeted by the media, but the Doom Patrol have had a long – if patchy – career for over 50 years. It all began back in 1963...

For its first 79 issues, *My Greatest Adventure* was a relatively straightforward adventure anthology book. Stories like "Flaming Village" rubbed shoulders with the pithy "I Was Buried Alive For 30 Days". Over time, the sci-fi-flavoured stories started to dominate, and eventually a decision was made to focus on one set of characters: the heroic oddballs and outsiders who would >



become known as the Doom Patrol, created by writer Arnold Drake (with scripting aid from Bob Haney) and artist Bruno Premiani.

The team were assembled by the mysterious "Chief", a wheelchair-bound genius (later named Dr Niles Caulder) who summons them to his underground lair and lays it all out: they're each bound by specific tragedies, but together they can work for the good of mankind. There's Rita Farr (alias Elasti-Girl), a former Hollywood starlet who on one eventful film shoot was chased by a crocodile, swept over a waterfall and exposed to mysterious gases that give her the power to shrink and grow at will. Larry Trainor was a pilot, but after flight-testing an experimental aircraft he blacked out and was exposed to "unknown wave belts" which granted him the dubious gift of being able to leave his body in spirit form for 60 seconds at a time. He became known as the Negative Man. Finally, there's Cliff Steele, a daredevil racing car driver critically injured, who has his brain transplanted into a metal body and is renamed Robotman.

Above: The original Doom Patrol were unusual for DC heroes of the time in that they were outcasts and felt that their powers were unwelcome afflictions, not blessings.

Below: Distinctive though the Doom Patrol were, their '60s stories reflected all DC's fads of the day – talking apes, hybrid creatures made up of parts of several animals, and so on...

THE WORLD'S STRANGEST HEROES!
THE DOOM PATROL
12
THIS IS THE ULTIMATE MISSION FOR WHICH I CREATED YOU -- THE DESTRUCTION OF THE DOOM PATROL! SUMMON THE OTHERS!
YES, MASTER, I WILL OBEY!

> "IT'S THE FIRST TIME A COMIC KILLED OFF AN ENTIRE TEAM"

kept the original issue numbering. *Doom Patrol* #87 heralded a bolder, more confident series. While the initial run had seen the team tackling small-fry threats – unexploded bombs, a giant squid and, memorably, nuclear creatures from the Earth's core – #87 saw the Doom Patrol tackle a plot by the unsubtly-named Brotherhood of Evil to steal the Statue of Liberty using a great big robot. That's more like it.

THE X-FACTOR

But hang on a second... A genius in a wheelchair, a Brotherhood Of Evil – this probably all sounds just a tiny bit familiar. There is an undeniable likeness between Doom Patrol and the X-Men – and many have speculated that Marvel's mutants may have been "inspired" by DC's oddballs. Whatever the case, while DC beat Marvel to it – the X-Men debuted in September 1963, three months after Doom Patrol – Marvel clearly had the more enduring and successful formula. The X-Men were a hit, while the Doom Patrol have had a rather rockier time of it over the years.

Original flavour *Doom Patrol* ran for a respectable 40 issues before the axe fell in 1968 due to waning popularity. Before the series ended, however, it had one big surprise up its sleeve... The final issue, #121, dated October 1968, opened with DC editor Murray Boltinoff and Bruno Premiani breaking the fourth wall to declare that the Doom Patrol would die unless you, the reader, did something about it. And die they did: Elasti-Girl, Robotman, the Chief and the Negative Man were blown up on the beach of

DOOM PATROL
THE WORLD'S STRANGEST HEROES!
THE DEATH OF THE DOOM PATROL?
IT'S TRUE, MURRAY? THEY WILL DIE? YOU DIDN'T TELL ME HOW TO FINISH THIS PAGE! YOU'RE GONNA KILL OUR-- DOOM PATROL?
DON'T KNOW, BRUNO! I'M NOT UP TO ME! UNLESS THE "MARINES" SEND HELP... THE DOOM PATROL WILL AFTER THIS ISSUE!
AND YOU JOLLY READER YOU ARE THE MARINES! ONLY YOU CAN SAVE THE DOOM PATROL NOW-- AND I KID YOU NOT!

fishing village Codsville (oh, come on!) by Nazi commander Zahl. It was the first time a superhero comic had offed an entire team, and it made for a sensational finale. A few reprints followed, but that was that until nearly 10 years later...

In mid 1977 DC's anthology title *Showcase* was revived and the Doom Patrol were selected to star in the opening three-issue arc, penned by *Action Comics*' Paul Kupperberg, with art by Joe Staton. A fan of old, Kupperberg was conscious of the weight the team's deaths had had on readers, and resisted the temptation to bring the old characters back... mostly. While the first issue reveals that Robotman has been rebuilt, it also introduces three new team members: Arani Desai (alias Celsius), Joshua Clay (Tempest) and Valentina Vostok, the Negative Woman.

It was a while before we saw any more of these newbies, mind. Some guest appearances in books like *Superman Family* and *DC Comics Presents* aside, it was *another* 10 years before they were blessed with a book of their own. Kupperberg was once more on the writing duties, this time with art from *Legion Of Super-Heroes*' Steve Lightle.

Kupperberg's run introduced more new characters, like Rhea Jones (Lodestone). More controversially, he resurrected the Negative Man, albeit in a diminished form, with the Negative Spirit now inhabiting Valentina instead. But with Lightle departing after just five issues and Kupperberg after 18, this run feels like a stepping stone between the classic original and the arrival of a young Scottish writer named Grant Morrison.

Above: DC might have hoped that killing off the title characters would revive sales of the book... but then who would feature in the stories after that?

Below: Grant Morrison's first issue (series 2 #19) answered that question with a third new roster and gave the title his own spin.

STRANGE DAYS

In February 1989, Morrison was still best known for his impressive run on *Animal Man* (his mainstream breakthrough, *Arkham Asylum*, would come later that year). Brought in to take on the Doom Patrol after Kupperberg's departure, Morrison immediately set about making it his own, and boy did he ever...

Beginning with #19 and the four-part "Crawling From The Wreckage" arc, Morrison and *Doctor Strange* artist Richard Case set about building a new team. Robotman – now fully established as the core of any DP line-up – remained, but was reimagined as a more explicit metaphor for a disabled man. Rebis was a hermaphroditic combination of white male Larry Trainor, black woman Dr Eleanor Poole and the Negative Spirit. And the brand-new characters were equally fascinating: Crazy Jane, a schizophrenic with 64 separate personalities, each with its own superpower; Dorothy Spinner >

Above: John Byrne wrote and pencilled a fourth series in 2004. In characteristic Byrne fashion, it drew heavily on Silver Age DC, down to a sentient gorilla...

(actually created by Kupperberg in issue 14, now promoted to a regular), whose fantasies could come to life; and Danny the Street, devised by Brendan McCarthy, who was... well, a living *street*.

The enemies they faced, too, were increasingly bizarre. The Brotherhood of Dada, introduced in issue 26, were a nihilistic sect devoted to unreason. In "The Painting That Ate Paris", the Brotherhood used a powerful painting to absorb the city; the Scissormen could literally cut people out of reality; and the Men From N.O.W.H.E.R.E. were eerie soul husks who only spoke in acronyms: "Naked Old Widows Hover Earlier Round Easter", "Now Oblivion Waits Hideous Evil Requires Elimination", etc.

> "SEXUALITY IN VARIOUS FORMS IS A KEY THEME"

Morrison and Case's DP run casts a long shadow, both on the characters and Morrison himself. Today, his Doom Patrol looks a little like a trial run for the two strands of his career: his occasionally cryptic creator-owned work and his mainstream reinventions of Batman and X-Men. For all their out-there qualities, those books were about boiling the premise down to its original essence – something that he does for the first time with *Doom Patrol*. The run lasted for 44 issues, ending with Crazy Jane (temporarily) exiled to our reality, and the Chief apparently dead following the revelation that he had arranged the accidents that led to the formation of the team.

NEW BEGINNINGS

1993 saw the founding of DC's Vertigo imprint, and one of the launch titles was *Doom Patrol #64*, written by Rachel Pollack. Like Kupperberg before her, Pollack had long been a fan of the series – even writing a string of amusing letters to the book which were printed towards the end of Morrison's run, declaring her desire to take charge. To this day, some fans believe this is how she got the job, but in reality the letters were merely a joke. Pollack had been hired thanks to a well-received sample script, not to mention her credentials as an award-winning science fiction author.

Rather than sweep away the remnants of Morrison's run, Pollack elected to pick up from where he left off. "I wanted to write *DP* in the first place because of what Grant Morrison was doing," she told Sequart in 2014. This continuity was assisted by the fact that Richard Case remained as artist for the opening arc, "Sliding In The Wreckage". The team line-up was similar too: Cliff, Dorothy, Niles Caulder – not dead, but now just a head – plus a few intriguing additions. George and Marion were two energy beings contained in Invisible Man-style bandages; Charlie The Doll was an actual living toy; and, crucially, Kate Godwin, alias Coagula. Kate is a former sex worker who gains her powers to coagulate liquids and dissolve solids (it's more useful than it sounds) after 'encountering' Rebis – and she may well be the first transgender superhero in comics, predating *Batgirl*'s Alysia Yeoh by more than a decade. A trans-woman herself, Pollack brought empathy and understanding to a character who in another writer's hands might have been portrayed as a cliché or a joke.

Indeed, sexuality in various forms became the key theme of Pollack's run on *Doom Patrol*, something that has earned it a strong fan-following in the years since. At the time, however, sales dwindled again and the book was cancelled for the second time with #87 in February 1995.

It would be six years before the Doom Patrol made their next appearance, this time from the

team of John Arcudi and Tang Eng Huat – and the tone couldn't have been more removed from the Morrison/Pollack years.

Banished from Vertigo and back under the main DC logo, the Arcudi/Huat Doom Patrol is a far more straightforward series. It finds Robotman pulled back into action to lead a team of slightly generic heroes: Fast Forward (he can see 60 seconds into the future and is cynical, which leads to him being nicknamed... wait for it... Negative Man); Kid Slick, who sounds like a 1980s rapper but is a dude with a frictionless forcefield; the pyrokinetic Fever; and Freak, who has alien hair.

They're no-one's favourite *DP* line up, frankly, but there's something cannily meta about Arcudi's approach to the series. Unsubtly commenting on the way superhero franchises are continually revised and rebooted for commercial gain, he positions Robotman as initially being in it for the money and the Doom Patrol themselves as a corporate entity, now working for the cynical industrialist Thayer Jost.

Over time, Arcudi's run brought back Dorothy Spinner, forging a more concrete link with the previous series, and the book did well enough, pootling along quietly for 22 issues.

RETURN AND REBOOT

A reboot followed in 2004, written and drawn by John Byrne. Promising a return to the tone of the original Doom Patrol, DC elected to wipe away previous continuity and start afresh – something that annoyed dedicated fans. And while the decision to debut the new team (Rita, Cliff, Larry plus Vortex, Nudge and Grunt) in *JLA #94* made a certain amount of sense, it also meant that their solo book proper got off to a muddled start.

The Byrne reboot is not terrible, despite its poor reputation. Grunt – a six-limbed gorilla with a (damaged) human brain – was fun, as well as a pleasing nod back to Monsieur Mallah from the 1960s run, and Nudge was interestingly tortured. Byrne has a point when he says that his run "has much more in common with the Drake/Premiani version than what followed," but it wasn't enough and the book was axed after 18 issues. Shortly after, DC used its Infinite Crisis event to restore the original continuity.

And so, finally – until this month, at least – we reach the end of the line. Keith Giffen and Matthew Clark's run is by far the most confident of the post-Vertigo *Doom Patrol*s, breezily summed up at the start of each issue as follows: "A team of superpowered misfits, the Doom Patrol was assembled by Dr Niles Caulder to preemptively thwart threats to humanity." Giffen and Clark told a pacey superhero story while reinstating much of the weirdness.

Above left: *Doom Patrol* became one of the first books to carry the Vertigo imprint (series 2, #64 onwards) but under Morrison had been pretty weird for some time.

Above right: The 2001 third series written by John Arcudi had quite a different tone.

Part of this was down to Giffen's decision to nod back to the series' Vertigo years. With continuity now fully restored, we got to revisit Crazy Jane, Danny the Street – reduced to Danny the Brick by the villainous Gentrifiers! – and Animal-Vegetable-Mineral Man from the original run. It ended too soon, with #22 in 2011, but Giffen and Clark's *Doom Patrol* felt like a smart synthesis of the vintage run, Morrison/Pollack and modern super-books.

Since then the Doom Patrol have cameoed in the New 52 *JLA*, but no solo series has been forthcoming, nor is there one on the DC Rebirth slate. Instead, the team have found a new home in DC's fledgling Young Animal imprint, guided by Gerard Way. We can't wait to see what bizarro adventures are coming their way. CH

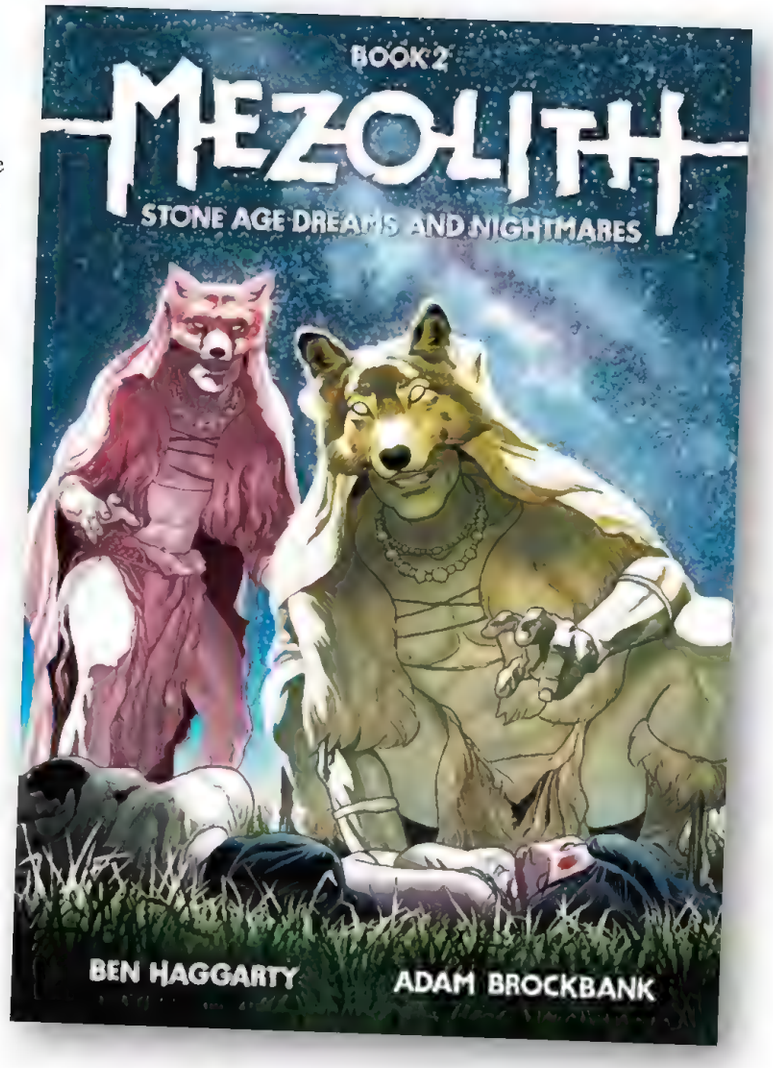
A PAGE RIGHT OUT OF PREHISTORY

JAMES LOVEGROVE DIGS DOWN INTO THE HIDDEN STRATA OF **BEN HAGGARTY** AND **ADAM BROCKBANK**'S **MEZOLITH**

MeZolith debuted in *The DFC*, the children's anthology weekly which ran between 2008 and 2009, then died and was resurrected three years later, with greater success, as the appropriately named *The Phoenix*. Even among that comic's gallimaufry of styles and genres – comedy, sci-fi drama, funny-animal cartoons, schoolyard adventure – *MeZolith*'s Stone Age rites-of-passage saga stood out. Poised, poignant, sombre, creepy, occasionally gory, often scary, the strip almost seemed out of place, quite at odds with the company it kept, like a message beamed in from an altogether different sector of the galaxy.

Deservedly it was one of the first *DFC* strips to be republished in a collected edition. In this format its episodic narrative can be seen to hang together seamlessly, beautifully, as a whole. The setting is Britain before rising sea levels separated it from mainland Europe – in a kind of geological Brexit – during the Mesolithic period. To be specific, events take place in what is now North East Yorkshire, and centre on a hunter-gatherer tribe, the Kansa, whose lives are inextricably, almost mystically bound up with the natural world surrounding them. The strip's protagonist, Poika, is a young teenager gradually discovering that everything is darker, deeper, more treacherous than he used to believe.

The book originally appeared in 2010 as an album-sized hardcover, and now, six years on, is being reissued at standard comic size by a different imprint, Archaia, with a new cover. Accompanying its release is a hotly anticipated sequel. *MeZolith Book Two* continues to trace Poika's progress towards adulthood, and the results are just as stunning and compelling this time around. Our hero, slightly older, somewhat wiser, learns about love and hate and the price of both.



Above: Artist Adam Brockbank brings a wealth of production design experience to bear, having designed creatures, props and scenes for all eight *Harry Potter* movies among many more

NON-COMICS ROOTS

What's perhaps most remarkable about *MeZolith* is that neither of its creators is a long-standing comics professional. Writer Ben Haggarty is a "performance storyteller" who trained in mime and theatre direction during the 1970s and has had a long, lauded career acting out myths and folktales on-stage for audiences of all ages around the world. Artist Adam Brockbank, meanwhile, has earned a living primarily by providing storyboards and concept art for blockbuster movies. You've probably seen most if not all of the films he's worked on – they include *X-Men, Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation, Captain America: The First Avenger*, every *Harry Potter* and the latest *Star Wars*.

Together these two have, for all their apparent inexperience, conjured up something that rivals just about any graphic novel on the shelves in terms of polish and sophistication, and outdoes most. Brockbank's lush, dreamy artwork, with its unparalleled use of colour and light, blends perfectly with Haggarty's smart, nuanced script. Every aspect of the characters' prehistoric existence feels real and tangible, even the myths and magic. *MeZolith* is above all else a story about stories. It's about the tales people tell one another to make sense of their world and about the beliefs and superstitions that provide anchorage during the storms of fate and serve as cautionary reminders of just how arbitrary and cruel life can be – but also how thrilling.

> "EVERY ASPECT OF EXISTENCE FEELS REAL, EVEN THE MYTHS"

For Haggarty, folktales and fairy tales fulfil an important role to this day "as provocative entertainments which can, at the same time, promote intense questioning of the values by which we live". In his performance work, he says, he >

ALL IMAGES © BEN HAGGARTY & ADAM BROCKBANK

attempts to convey as vividly as possible the primordial power and quintessential mystery of such round-the-campfire yarns. "Removed from the dynamic cradle of live improvisation and the strength of audience response," he says, "many modern retellings of myths and fairy tales feel neutered. My aim is to unleash as much of the ancestral lifeforce as I can from the stories." This applies equally to *MeZolith*, which he explains "seeks to explore how archaic our imagination and impulses still are. It's a cry for continuity."

By his own admission, the strip is aimed squarely at young teens, although its appeal is broader and it can be appreciated just as well by adults, who will be attuned to its wistful ironies. Poika, on the cusp of manhood, is beginning to understand that life has infinite subtleties and hidden dangers. Sometimes the perils are overt. During a hunting expedition in the opening chapter, for instance, youthful recklessness leads to him being gored in the leg by a bull's horn, which brings him close to death and leaves him with a limp for the rest of his life. Sometimes, however, there are subtler forces at play, such as the emotions aroused by the Mirror Stone, a cube of metallic pyrite whose symmetry and unearthly shining beauty brings out the worst in people: avarice, envy, murderous desire.

These themes of discovering the true worth of things and of oneself are universal, no less pertinent today than they presumably were during the Stone Age. *MeZolith* is, as Haggarty puts it, "an attempt to say forget 'teenagerdom', which is a marketing construct of 1950s consumer capitalism. Get out there and find out what is really necessary, what is really valuable, what is really satisfying, understand the energies bursting into your body, learn how to master them – and then try to really live, with real people, in the real world."

Haggarty and Brockbank had known each other for a while before they decided, in 2007, to join forces on a comic. The decision to pitch their story in the distant past arose from the former's "wish to

Above and opposite: As author Ben Haggarty describes it, *MeZolith* begins as "a conjectural reconstruction of the lives of a small tribal group, living about 10,000 years ago, on the western shores of the North Sea basin."

"GET OUT THERE AND FIND WHAT'S REALLY VALUABLE"

think more about [the notion] that there might have been a global-wide ancestral worldview in which human life was acknowledged to be entirely dependent on nature yet, somehow, also dependent on an instinctively constructed, conditional cosmology: one which determined the obligations and behaviours humans must abide by in order to pay for all that nature has provided for them."

SHARED VISION

This entailed a great deal of homework for both creators, researching the ethnography and anthropology of the period. It also entailed figuring out how to fuse their individual styles together. "As an oral storyteller my primary tool is my imagination," says Haggarty. "I 'tell' pictures, and here was a chance to work with an amazing artist who could externalise those images. As I began to understand what Adam liked to draw, it became a true collaboration. I began to adapt my stories and scripts to give him full rein. His drawings inspired me to go in different directions. We both entered a world we were building together, and ideas began to spark between us – a shared vision emerged. I believe the result is a genuinely immersive experience – something in you 'goes to the world of *MeZolith*' when you engage with it. A dialogue starts. It speaks to a very archaic part of ourselves, which finds familiarity in that world."

Brockbank's style is unique but his influences are many. "My training," he says, "was in Fine Art, specifically painting, but the artists that I admire and were an influence when that was my interest >

Above: A key aspect of the concept is that myths and magic are as "real" as daily life. No point recreating the campfire and not the "round-the-campfire yarns" that go with it

don't really inform my comic and film work. In my case it's a very different hat, the painting hat!"

Yet reading comics from an early age was a formative experience, too, which began with "the black-and-white reprints published in the UK of Silver Age Marvel titles, with artists like Kirby, Colan, Ditko, Buscema, etc. It was the artwork that attracted me more than the storytelling, and to see these artists represented in a larger format – not the US format but a more generous tabloid size – and without the rather haphazard and distracting colour was crucial. Like many comic artists, I still own a worn and stained copy of *How To Draw Comics The Marvel Way* and have never come across a better or more practical guide."

Comics still feed into his artistic technique, Brockbank adds. "The big influences, who I continue to look at for inspiration and help, are Moebius and Otomo. A great many others have come and gone, but these two feel like the foundation stones of the way I try to work in this medium. Both artists have an essentially clean, open line which, particularly in the case of Moebius, allows for a naturalistic and luminous colour."

If there is any progression between the art in *MeZolith* Book One and Book Two it's that it now betrays greater elements of Mike Mignola and Duncan Fegredo. However, when such comparisons are mentioned Brockbank is quick to dismiss them, stating modestly, "Well, if it does look Mignola-esque or Fegredo-esque I would be over the moon! Two artists whose work I revere and of course look at a lot, but any resemblance, as they say, is purely coincidental."

"THE ORIGINAL PUBLISHER FELT BOOK 2 IS 'TOO STRONG'"

Working on big-budget movies has helped Brockbank, rather than hindered him, when it comes to drawing comics. The two mediums "have a great deal in common," he says. "That's the great attraction. The language of film, with its time cuts, close-ups, establishing shots, tracking shots – visually it is like a series of narrative stills. Otomo, for example, is deeply influenced by this language. *Akira* is still the most cinematic comic book ever. But it is the things that are unique to comics that attract too – the ever-changing framing, the graphic impact of the whole page, which allows the reader to move

backward and forward along the narrative line, breaking frames, the drama of the page turn, and so on. A good comic is like a good edit. There's a rhythm to the narrative, and there are different ways to slow down or speed up the flow, to heighten and personalise the drama or to create distance and objectivity. How do you frame the unfolding events? That's the craft."

NOT FOR CHILDREN

Haggarty's scripts, although detailed, afford plenty of leeway for visual interpretation. "Ben is meticulous," Brockbank says. "His scripts are very carefully constructed, very considered, with frames described in detail, a proper comic script. But there remains a great deal of space for investigating the best way to visualise the unfolding story. Sometimes it's an extra frame, sometimes a frame can be removed, and as you thumbnail, you discover that you need less dialogue here, more there – it's very organic. It's one of the best periods in the process, turning that first draft into thumbnails and discovering together the emerging form."

MeZolith is visceral stuff at times. Violence is portrayed frankly and unflinchingly. There are animal killings, limb loppings, heart gougings, and more. This is nature – not least human nature – red in tooth and claw. There are

Above: The graphic novel is suitable for "older children and adults", pretty clearly not for youngsters. It delves not just into prehistory but into "the archaeology of the imagination."

also "ice cannibals" who eat their own lips first before turning to other fleshy foodstuffs; a strange vast naked goddess with huge lice in her hair; a giant deformed blue baby whose hunger knows no bounds; dead infants; a hideous, half-deranged witch woman. All of which has led to problems. "In fact *MeZolith* Book Two was eventually perceived as being 'too strong' for the original publisher, Random House," Haggarty says, "and they returned the rights to us."

Yet such nastiness is offset by the rich gorgeousness of Brockbank's illustrations, from the panoramic tableaus of rugged, forested landscape to the ethereally bewitching Swan Maiden whose beauty captures a tribesman's heart. This contrast – horror and splendour side by side, often intermingled – is what makes *MeZolith* so captivating. A frisson of realism permeates both volumes, even when it comes to the fantastical elements. It evokes the feeling that the dangerous currents which the strip explores still exist in our present-day homogenised world, just below the glossy high-tech surface.

That, in large part, is Haggarty's and Brockbank's aim. "I believe," Haggarty says, "that from the dawn of its existence, humanity has used stories to express and understand its profound gratitude for the gift of being given a place in the universe from which to experience life. *MeZolith* is at one level an exploration of the archaeology of the imagination – trying to suggest which might be the very oldest stories that are still being told, the ones that have always been told. For example I first heard the story we present as 'Urga' as an urban legend about a baby being found abandoned in a plastic carrier bag in a skip in Manchester. Yet its plot is found amongst tribal peoples living on almost every continent on the planet."

In other words, there is a vibrant contemporary resonance in the Kansa tribe's ancient rituals and everyday struggles. Forget the Flintstones, then – here is a true "modern Stone Age family".

CASINO
Jack 06

The art of JOCK

AS THE ARTIST IS CELEBRATED IN A NEW BOOK, **DAVID BARNETT** TALKS TO AUTHOR AND SUBJECT

Mark Simpson, known to the comics world as Jock, has had his hands on some of the most iconic characters in the many graphic fiction universes he's dabbled in. From Judge Dredd to Wolverine, Batman to Daredevil, Green Arrow to The Losers, Jock's artwork has adorned many of the most highly-acclaimed comics of the past 15 years… and that's before we get into his creator-owned successes such as *Wytches* and his movie poster work, which encompasses both classics such as *Halloween* and *The Thing* and modern masterpieces like *Shaun Of The Dead* and *Pan's Labyrinth*.

Who loves Jock? Everybody loves Jock. Here's Peter Berg, director of *Battleship* and co-writer of *The Losers* movie adapted from the Vertigo comic that brought Jock to fame: "Jock's sense of composition is flawless and, for any film-maker, beyond inspiring."

And here's Jim Lee, DC Comics co-publisher: "He's an artist's artist who's managed to forge a brilliant career doing some amazingly personal work on some of the world's most commercial and familiar characters."

Comics writer Scott Snyder, Jock's collaborator on *Wytches*, adds that Jock's is "an artistic style that speaks to passion, to emotionally charged storytelling, to finding meaning behind the harsh brickwork of the everyday."

BEGINNINGS

These comments come in various parts of a new book celebrating his career, *The Art of Jock*, published by Titan. It's a sumptuous, fulfilling monster of a book – a coffee-table book, if you will, but make sure you have one strong coffee table.

Not only does it display Jock's artwork, from his *2000 AD* days through his DC and Marvel work to his movie posters, it also offers an insight into the man himself, where he comes from, where he's going, and how he achieves those instantly recognisable pieces of art.

The main text of the book is by Will Dennis, former Vertigo editor, who has a particular connection with Jock: "Yeah," says Dennis. "I almost killed his career!"

Opposite: Jock's evocative cover for the first issue of *Scalped*, the Vertigo series by writer Jason Aaron with art by RM Guéra. Jock provided the cover art for most of the series' 60-issue run.

Dennis was at Vertigo, the mature imprint of DC Comics that was in the business of taking risks either with brand new titles such as *The Invisibles* and *Preacher*, or giving old properties a kick up the backside in the manner of Grant Morrison's *Animal Man* and, arguably, Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*.

In 2002, writer Andy Diggle pitched an idea to Vertigo: a reboot of an obscure DC war comic called *The Losers*, which he wanted to update into a modern, smart, sexy thriller, a comics take on the likes of *Ocean's Eleven* or *Three Kings*.

Diggle had cut his teeth, like many British creators, on the UK's sci-fi weekly *2000 AD*, and had broken into the US with Vertigo titles such as historical *Hellblazer* spin-off *Lady Constantine*. His star was rising, but did he have enough clout to bring a virtual unknown artist in with him on *The Losers*?

Dennis recalls: "Andy came to me and said he wanted Jock on >

SCALPED © JASON AARON & RAJKO MILOSEVIC. ART COURTESY OF DC COMICS/VERTIGO

JOHN CONSTANTINE, HELLBLAZER © DC COMICS/VERTIGO. SUPERMAN, JOKER © AND TM DC COMICS. THE LOSERS ART COURTESY OF WARNER BROS

Left: Jock's first work for Vertigo was an issue of *Hellblazer* written by Mike Carey.

Above: A development drawing Jock provided for the *Losers* movie

Opposite: Cover art for *Adventures of Superman* #14, demonstrating Jock's amazing ability to bring startling new perspectives to the most established titles.

The Losers. He'd worked with him on Lenny Zero at *2000 AD*, and kept insisting that I check out his art. I was like, well, it's OK... I wasn't sure if it was the look we wanted for *The Losers*. I had in mind maybe something more slick, more cool, than this painted work I was seeing, which was great but maybe not necessarily right for the book. Plus, when a new book came out there was a tendency to put at least one big name on it... Although Andy Diggle had done a lot of work he wasn't hugely well known at that point, and pairing him with another unknown..."

But Diggle kept working on Dennis, and sent him the *Lenny Zero* pages he and Jock had worked on, which were altogether different from the painted style of the other art Dennis had seen. Dennis was won over. "I started to get pretty excited," he says. "But there was still this issue of convincing everyone else at Vertigo to put two relative unknowns on a new book."

However, the then Vertigo executive editor Karen Berger and her husband Richard Bruning, creative director at DC, visited a convention in Bristol, where they saw Jock's artwork... and suddenly Will Dennis didn't have to do a whole lot of convincing. "They were like, 'Wow, have you seen this guy Jock?' And I'm like, 'Yeah, maybe we should use him...'"

> "*2000 AD* WAS MY LIGHTBULB MOMENT. I KNEW THIS WAS WHAT I WANTED TO DO"

And the rest, as they sometimes say, is comics history. Jock's work on *The Losers* was an instant hit with fans (as was the try-out issue he did first, a one-off *Hellblazer* story written by Mike Carey), and the partnership of Diggle and Jock went on to reinvent the Justice League's emerald archer for 2007's *Green Arrow: Year One*, which was a major inspiration for the character's hit CW TV adaptation, *Arrow*. Jock's course for stardom was firmly set.

ORIGINS

Jock was born in East Kilbride but grew up in Totnes, Devon, earning the nickname inevitably bestowed on any Scots kid who finds himself living south of Hadrian's Wall. He first fell in love with comics thanks to *2000 AD*. "I started reading it when I was 13 or 14," he says, "after I saw an issue of the Judge Dredd reprints that came out from Eagle Comics. I'd always been into art but as soon as I saw my first issue of *2000 AD*, that was my lightbulb moment. I knew this was what I wanted to do."

During the 1980s and 1990s, comics art experienced a dramatic shift. If there had ever been a single "house style" at Marvel or DC, it >

had gone out the window, and artists with finer sensibilities than straight comic art were finding success with fresh and innovative styles – Bill Sienkiewicz, Duncan Fegredo, Simon Bisley, Dave McKean. Jock studied them and worked out through trial-and-error and reverse-engineering just how they did what they did, and set to developing his own style.

With his friend and fellow artist Dom Reardon, Jock went to a comics convention in Scotland, hitch-hiking up from Devon. The first person they met when they walked through the door was artist Glenn Fabry, and they hesitantly showed him their work.

"Why are you showing this to me?" Fabry said – not because he was annoyed at their approaching him, but because he was blown away by the work. "Fuck off and make some money!"

A dream response, for sure, and one that paid immediate dividends. Jock recalls: "Someone overheard the conversation and went up to Steve McManus, who was the editor of *2000 AD* at the time, and he actually came looking for us!"

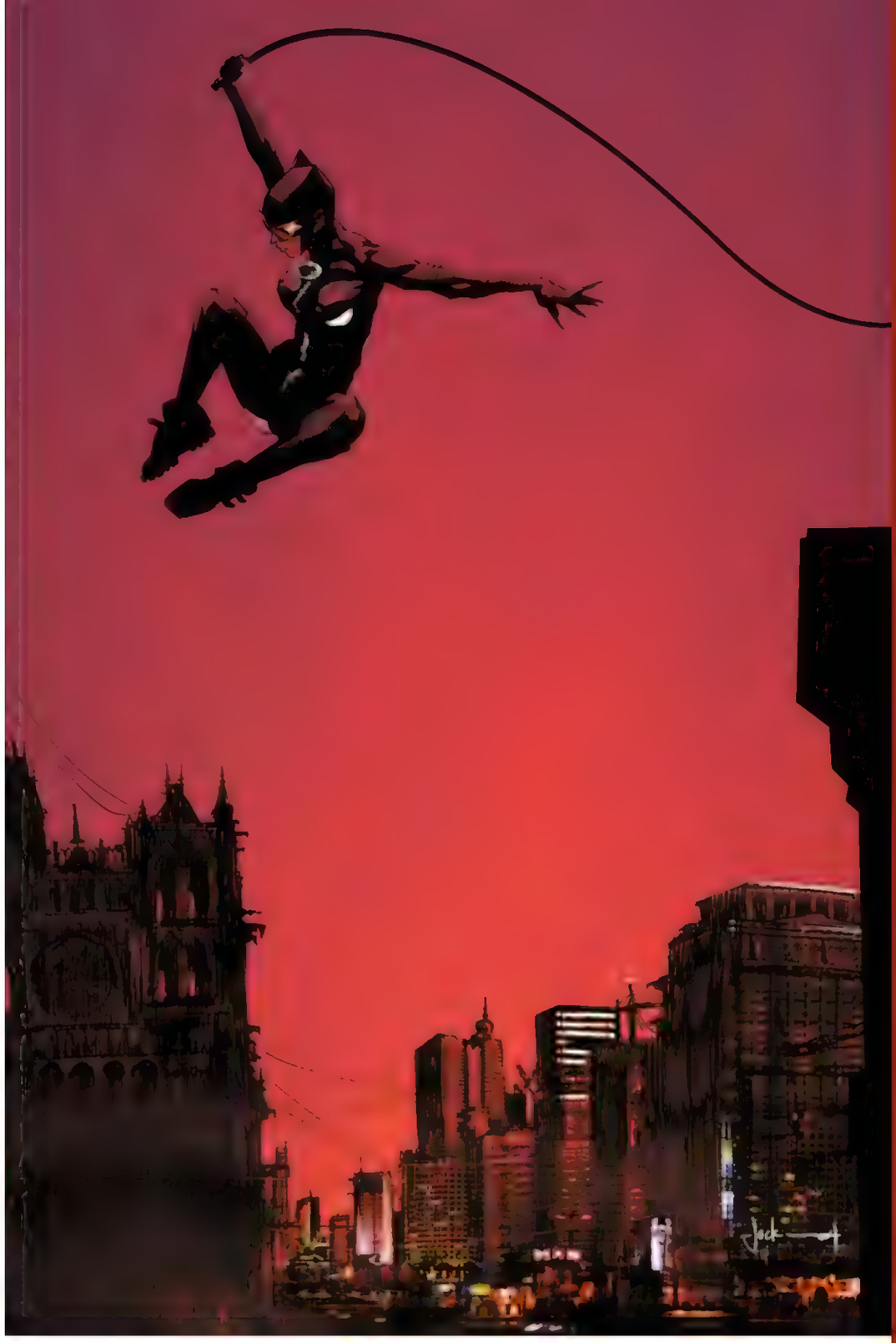
ACHIEVEMENTS

Jock soon started getting small assignments for *2000 AD*, but it wasn't until some years later that he got his big break with the comic. Judge Dredd had always been his favourite *2000 AD* character, and he'd been working on a Judge Dredd painting, which he delivered, rather appropriately, in the early days of the year 2000. He got a phone call from the new *2000 AD* editor, the aforementioned Andy Diggle. Not only did they want to use Jock's painting for a cover, but they also wondered if he might draw a dozen pages of Dredd comic art a month?

"I'm proud to say I've never had to do a proper job since that moment," laughs Jock. "There have been some tough times, obviously, when I thought maybe I should go down the route of getting a job, and when we had a baby I was wondering whether I should try to find something more stable than drawing comics, but I always stuck at it..."

And it has paid off. When *Comic Heroes* speaks to Jock, he's been doing a lot of work at a certain Pinewood Studios. On a certain movie. Which might be the eighth in a certain franchise concerning wars and stars. But other than quietly muttering something about "costume designs" he can't say a single word more. If he did, he'd have to kill us, and he'd have to do it before Disney got to him first.

We both quickly change the subject, though Jock's happy to talk about his other movie work. That >



Above: Classic composition, flawless execution: Jock's *Catwoman #43* cover

Opposite: The landmark *Losers #1* cover, which hit the stands like a bombshell in 2003

THE LOSERS, CATWOMAN AND OTHER CHARACTERS © DC COMICS/VERTIGO

“I REALLY WANT TO DO MORE CREATOR-OWNED STUFF”

Above: Another of Jock's development drawings for the *Losers* movie

Left: In addition to movie posters, Jock has created Judge Dredd images released as high-quality art prints

Opposite: An iconic image from *Savage Wolverine #9*.

began in 2011, when he was approached by Mondo, a company based in Austin, Texas, that creates limited edition posters for classic, geeky movies and old horror shows such as *Zombie* or *The Last House On The Left* and John Carpenter's *The Thing*. Hollywood came calling too, bringing Jock in to work on art, designs and costumes for a plethora of movies, including Peter Berg's *Battleships* and, in a neat bit of symmetry, the Alex Garland-penned fan favourite movie *Dredd*.

Garland is a big fan of the artist, saying: "His range can be subtle, lyrical, bold, gritty or muscular. The work has a breathing, living quality." So impressed was Garland that Jock was brought in to work on the next movie project he was involved in, *Ex Machina*.

ASPIRATIONS

The Art Of Jock, in addition to showcasing Jock's art, offers a real feel of how his images are put together and plenty of detail about how he works. For his comic and poster work he still begins the old-fashioned way, by hand. But he's increasingly using digital methods to finish his work, after teaching himself to use Photoshop and other programs the same way he figured out how to draw in the first place – trial-and-error and tinkering to see just what he could and couldn't do.

"I think it's quite freeing, having these extra tools," he says. "And that's how I think of them, just another tool at my disposal, along with my pens and brushes. It gives me more options, more freedom to create."

The book presents a portrait of Jock both as an artist and a person, and that's down to Will Dennis, who adds a whole new dimension with insightful observations as one of the comics professionals who perhaps knows him best.

"The guy has worked his ass off to get where he is," says Dennis. "Yet, he's one of the most charming people you'd ever hope to meet or work with."

Now that work is coming to an end on that film of which we must not speak, what's next for Jock? "What I really want to do more of is the creator-owned stuff, like *Wytches*," he says, referring to the horror story he crafted with Scott Snyder, published by Image – the critics adored it, and it's genuinely one of the scariest comics you'll ever read. The good news is, there is more on the horizon. In the meantime, are there any classic characters he's itching to take on?

"I've done Dredd, Batman, Wolverine," Jock muses. "I'd like to have a crack at the Punisher, maybe..." CH

The Art Of Jock is out now, published by Titan Books.

WOLVERINE © MARVEL. JUDGE DREDD © RE BELLION LOSERS ART COURTESY OF WARNER BROS

MAKE MINE MARVEL UK!

INTENDED BY **THE HOUSE OF IDEAS** AS BLIGHTY'S ENTRÉE TO THE REAL (AMERICAN) THING, **MARVEL'S BRITISH ARM** BLOSSOMED IN WAYS NEVER ENVISAGED, BEFORE BEING UNDERMINED BY ITS PARENT COMPANY. **"SCINTILLATING"** **SEAN EGAN** TELLS THE STORY OF **MARVEL UK**.

EXTRA! NEW FACTS ABOUT FOOM!
THE MIGHTY WORLD OF
MARVEL
5P
NO.17 WEEK ENDING JAN. 27 1973
DEATH IS ON THE WING OF THE FANTHERS NO WAY YOU CAN ESCAPE THE VULTURE!
NO CAN DO—BUT I CAN'T! I DON'T DARE MOVE MUCH FURTHER! I'LL FALL!
FEATURING IN THIS CORNER: THE FANTASTIC FOUR VS. THE FORCES OF THE PUPPET MASTER!
ALL ACTION—ALL THRILLS—ALL IN THE MAGNIFICENT MARVEL TRADITION
AND IN THIS CORNER: THE INCREDIBLE HULK

Early in 1972, Marvel Comics publisher Martin Goodman and editor-in-chief Stan Lee were looking forward to the February launch of a new weekly British publication featuring their company's iconic characters. Fruit of a partnership with British packager Martspress, the publication – title unknown – was far enough developed for it to be advertised in the UK newsagent trade press. However, it fell victim to the culture of industrial action which predominated at the time in the UK. With Martspress hit by an electricians' strike, the launch was scrapped. Explains Robin Kirby, author of forthcoming Marvel UK history *From Cents to Pence*, "They were told ahead, 'You can print issue one but issue two you won't be able to print, 'cos we won't have power'."

Although hugely expensive and disappointing, the cancellation paved the way for a success story that Goodman and Lee could never have imagined.

Before the '70s, Marvel stories had been reprinted in the UK in various forms, notably the Power Comics line from Odhams Press and the pages of *TV21*. However, such licensing was often merely a cheap bulking-out exercise, with the Marvel material being subjected to the indignity of chopping, rejigging and re-dialoguing. Even with the more direct Martspress joint venture, Marvel had proceeded despite misgivings about a format that interspersed Marvel material with British humour and adventure strips. As Kirby says, "It was an odd mix."

"WE GOT MORE FAN MAIL FROM ENGLAND THAN FROM CANADA"

ALL IMAGES © MARVEL

THOR, GOD OF THUNDER, BATTLES the ABSORBING MAN
SPIDER-MAN
5P
COMICS WEEKLY
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
No 45
AT LAST -- HE'S FALLEN! AND WE'LL SEE TO IT THAT HE NEVER GETS UP AGAIN!
GOT TO MAKE MY MOVE -- NOW --
-- OR I'M FINISHED!
IN THE CLUTCHES OF The KINGPIN!

But Stan Lee – promoted to Marvel's president-publisher later in '72 – remained intrigued by the idea of a proper foothold in a country with no translation problems and a potentially vast number of True Believers – as then Marvel staffer Mike McGrath notes, "We got more fan mail from England than we got from Canada." Lee resolved to try again, but with the crucial difference that Marvel would be publishing directly. This time, there would be no contamination by outside material. Moreover, if there were any alterations, they would be alterations made for Marvel's purposes, not for another publisher's convenience. Plans were set in motion for a weekly anthology comic that would be both product and standard-bearer.

McGrath, the man tasked with developing the new weekly, was given a stack of British comics and the mission of creating a product that conformed to the publications on British newsagents' shelves in terms of format, frequency, colour type, size, page count and customs. He was also instructed to resize panels to more closely resemble the grid-like layouts of UK weeklies. Dialogue was to be amended to Anglicise spellings and idioms (for example, "underground" instead of "subway"). McGrath spent "the better part of four months just getting a template."

The weekly was to feature three strips: Spider-Man, the Hulk and the Fantastic Four, starting with their origin stories. McGrath: "There was never any discussion about who would be in the book. It was lead with your heavy hitters." As for the title, later Marvel-UK employee Dez Skinn reveals, "Stan wanted to call it *The Wonderful World of Marvel*." When Lee was persuaded that Disney might view this as passing-off, "mighty" was substituted for "wonderful."

Above: With each story from the monthly US sources serialised over two or more issues, Marvel UK titles needed many more covers and splash pages than the US supplied (left) and often turned to British newcomers as well as American journeymen. Collectors savour what are often early works by later superstars.

Remarkably, all this work was for a product that was envisaged as having no more than a promotional function. McGrath: "It was designed to be a vehicle that would introduce the characters and their complex backstories to the British readers.

"IT WAS FAR MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN EVEN THEY HAD HOPED"

BONUS! ACTION-PACKED ADVENTURES OF IRON MAN AND THOR!
SPIDER-MAN™
COMICS WEEKLY
7p
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
No. 80 WEEK ENDING AUGUST 24, 1974
YOU'RE CAUGHT IN A WEB OF YOUR OWN MAKING, SPIDER-MAN!
THERE'S NO WAY YOU CAN AVOID MY KILLER-PUNCH!
THE KINGPIN HAS WON AT LAST!
TM AND © 1974 MARVEL COMICS INTERNATIONAL, LTD

After a year or so, the hope was that the readers and newsagents would look favourably on getting the 'real' books, the American comics... The long-term goal was to sell monthly US books, not to get into the 5p market big-time."

Fearful of the Vietnam draft, McGrath headed back to college before his baby was birthed. His place was ultimately taken by Tony Isabella. Somewhere during this time, the comic's number of full-colour pages was raised from four to around half a dozen. (The rest of the 40 pages was a mixture of monochrome and green tinting, as was common in UK comics.) Panel resizing was discarded in favour of page-for-page reprints.

The Mighty World of Marvel issue 1 was cover-dated October 7, 1972. For their 5p, buyers received a Hulk t-shirt transfer (instead of the more costly Spider-Man mask McGrath had planned) and "three big supernatural movie-length adventures" – the "movie-length" part referring to the fact that, even though the original stories had been split into two, the strips were four times the length of those to be found in the average British boys' comic. The "supernatural" part reflected the introduction of an alien superhero culture to the British audience. A Stan Lee editorial caused British noses to scrunch at terms like "bullpen," "Excelsior" and indeed "soapbox." There was also British advertising – and later a letters column – overseen by UK editor Pippa M Melling.

Above: Part of the very successful first wave of Marvel UK titles, *Spider-Man Comics Weekly* ran for 157 issues – very respectable for British comics of the time.

Sales of *MWOM* (as it became affectionately known) were soon nudging the half-million mark – figures that would have delighted indigenous publishers such as IPC and DC Thomson even without the knock-on benefits of the brand recognition Marvel assiduously fostered. "It just all went nutty," says Kirby. "It was far more successful than even they hoped it might be."

FLYING HIGH

Intentionally or not, Marvel UK was indeed in the 5p market big-time. By February 1973, *Spider-Man Comics Weekly* was also successfully challenging the likes of *Tiger* and *Valiant* for the attention and pocket money of British kids. *The Avengers* expanded the British Marvel portfolio to three the following September. This title lacked any colour inside but had a glossy cover. Soon all the weeklies had this format. It was purely an economic measure, yet it made the Marvel UK line distinctive and attention-grabbing.

Kirby dates the start of a "synergy" between Marvel UK and Marvel US to October 1974. Unveiled as part of a non-superhero double-whammy with *Dracula Lives*, *Planet Of The Apes* was designed to cash in on the contemporary TV series of that name. With the UK titles weekly but the US originals monthly, running short of US material to

reprint would be a recurring problem at Marvel UK. With this weekly, though, the dilemma was particularly acute because the US title was only a recent launch. "At one point, we were printing the adaptations two or three months ahead of the Americans," Kirby notes. "So actually it's the American magazines that are reprints, not the British ones." Marvel openly admitted that the American *Tomb Of Dracula* remained monthly only because a bi-monthly schedule would affect the supply line to *Dracula Lives*. "There's lots of other examples," says Kirby.

In October 1976, Marvel gave the UK its very own superhero: Captain Britain (whose complete history was explored in *Comic Heroes* 28). The first incarnation of the Captain was doomed by the technological and cultural exigencies of the time (that is, it had to be done by Yanks). It was, however, the first example of the "originated" material that would eventually give the UK outfit an unequivocal validity.

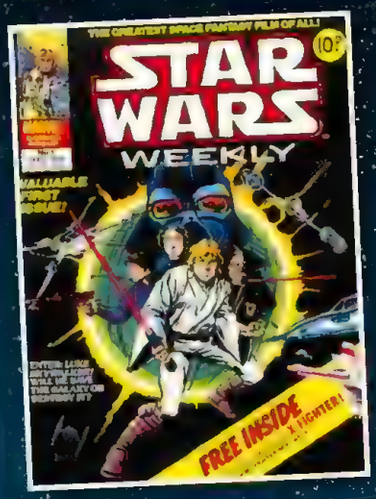
CRASHING TO EARTH

Unsurprisingly, *Star Wars Weekly* – launched in February 1978 – did well for British Marvel. The general trend for the line, though, was alarming. Distinctive "landscape-format" comics, a war title and expansion into monthlies had not arrested a precipitous sales decline. "As with every other publisher through the '70s, there was a huge attrition," notes Kirby. "At the time they got to three titles they were doing probably 300 to 400,000 each. By '76-'77, when they had seven or eight weeklies on the go, total sales were about half a million."

Marvel got cold feet and tried to beat a retreat. Kirby

Above: Paul Neary edited and co-wrote the return of Captain Britain, accompanying Avengers and X-Men reprints.

Below: Over its run, *Star Wars Weekly* included some originated stories.



"They actually offered the UK portfolio around to other publishers and only IPC were interested – in *Star Wars*. Didn't want the superheroes. Which is when they asked Dez to do a report."

At the time, Dez Skinn sported swept-back hair, tinted glasses and low-buttoned shirts. His publishing track record – which included success stories like *House Of Hammer* and *Starburst* – was equally flamboyant.

"I was asked what I would do to revitalise British Marvel," he says. "I produced a report about ten pages long. It made radical suggestions based on my knowledge of British weekly publishing." Skinn rejects the idea that Marvel UK's decline was just part of a general industry malaise: "They'd run out of good material, or the novelty had worn off." Stan Lee read his report and offered Skinn the opportunity to implement his own radical plans.

Taking full advantage of the "remarkably free hand" he was granted by Marvel US, Skinn instituted what he promoted as the Marvel Revolution. Said revolution included the panel-reformatting that Lee had rejected back in '72 ("resized versions fitted

much more story into a page, so we could run as many as six strips in 28 pages"). Skinn also ditched glossy covers ("They looked like American comics in the eyes of the trade and they cost a lot of money") in favour of newsprint. He shortened logos ("I made the titles more British-sounding, because we had one-word titles") and downplayed Marvel's stock-in-trade ("Britain never really liked superheroes anyway").

Sales and profits soared but fandom was appalled – although they did approve in principle of Skinn's decision to run UK-originated material. *Hulk Comic*, launched in March 1979, contained new stories featuring the titular green-skinned behemoth, the Black Knight, Nick Fury, Ant-Man and new character Night-Raven. It was a peculiar mix: the Hulk stories were pitched to people who only knew the character as portrayed in the new television series and the cover artwork was juvenile, but noir vigilante Night-Raven engaged in wanton killing.

Skinn declared his mission accomplished after 18 months. "I left because I'd achieved my aim, reinvigorated their line," he says. "If I'd have stayed I'd have become little more than a production editor." His two lasting legacies were the rebirth of Captain Britain, whose comeback he contrived within the pages of the Black Knight, and *Doctor Who Magazine*, launched in October 1979 and still going today.

Though Skinn's panel-resizing policy was soon abandoned, Marvel UK sometimes caused fandom even greater dismay over the following decade. With sales of comics now taking a hit from computer games, the company increasingly seemed to prefer licensed titles, with their ready-made markets whether nursery-age (*Care Bears, Inspector Gadget*) or older (*Thundercats, Transformers*), over their own iconic characters. The mercenary philosophy and dilution of identity was epitomised by a UK *Star Trek* comic which reprinted material licensed from Marvel's old rival, DC.

Above: A second series of *MWOM* launched in 1983 as a monthly, in full colour (both very unusual for a newsstand British comic), costing 65p when most British comics were priced at around 20p or less.

A NEW DAWN

Just when it seemed that Marvel UK was now the House of No Ideas, though, along came a new revolution. It started with editorial director Richard Starkings. John Freeman, a Marvel UK editor and writer of the period, says: "Richard was very keen to have Marvel UK titles on the US newsstand and succeeded in doing that with *Knights of Pendragon, Death's Head, Dragon's Claws*."

"WE WERE PRINTING STORIES THREE MONTHS AHEAD OF THE U.S."

In 1990, Vincent Conran was appointed managing director and ramped up the output of comics that had all the hallmarks of being American – roughly 6x10-inch size, full-colour interiors, monthly schedules, sold in the US – yet were made in Britain. "The American market is the biggest comic market in the world, certainly of superheroes," Conran says. He admits that the strategy was also driven by the prosaic fact that licensed comics "were going through a trough because they weren't on television. *Thomas the Tank Engine*, we were waiting for a new television series..." Conran hired Paul Neary as editorial director. Though better known as a comics artist, Neary had experience, having previously succeeded Skinn back in the '80s.

For its part, Marvel US was also keen. Freeman: "They were facing competition from new independent publishers like Image. Marvel US saw Marvel UK as an opportunity to produce extra books."

There was, of course, a certain element of coals-to-Newcastle in Marvel UK's parent company leaning on it for material, but what British fan/creator hadn't dreamt of supplying comics to the country that had been responsible for so many of the best examples of the form? Neary's first four US-format titles – *Death's Head II*, *Hell's Angel*, *Motormouth* and *Warheads* – saw American comics fans instantly enraptured by the penchant of UK creatives for in-jokes, sarcasm, grit and anti-heroes. The iconic success of the new line was *Death's Head II*, whose initial limited series was, according to Freeman, "one of the first titles to ever sell out of its first print run and be reprinted at Marvel US's direction." In this boom period, the premiere issue of even a minor US-format title like 1993's *Shadow Riders* could shift 142,000 copies.

Above: Beating Image Comics at its own game, Marvel's UK-originated American-format comics were a hit in the early '90s and launched the international careers of successful artists such as Liam Sharp (left).

Even with the new ventures, the licensed titles and the nursery

> "ONE OF THE FIRST TITLES EVER TO SELL OUT AND BE REPRINTED"

line, there remained a linear thread to the early days, and to the core Marvel identity. Conran reports that Stan Lee – though now attached to Marvel in a nebulous ambassadorial role – "was very much involved... He came to the London office a good few times when I was in charge."

Marvel UK had pulled off what had always eluded it: both pleasing the accountants and fulfilling the dreams of fandom. What could possibly go wrong?

"I was editing 12 books in one go," says Freeman. "The quality of the books might have suffered simply because of the demands being made on Marvel UK staff by editors at Marvel US."

Conran disagrees that there was a diminution in quality, but in any case, over in the States, Marvel, like all other comics publishers, began experiencing a backlash from consumers exhausted by sprawling crossover story arcs and endless special editions and cover variants.

Above: Several of the '90s Marvel UK titles threw everything into the mix, including the kitchen sink. *Warheads* tied in with the X-Men in early issues, then later had everything from dinosaurs to zombies.

Kirby: "The whole thing just went phut. When Marvel went into Chapter 11 [bankruptcy] and then managed to escape it, they had to sell off various things. So they sold Marvel UK to Panini."

TWILIGHT YEARS

The 1999 ignominy of being offloaded to a company Marvel US had once owned might seem to mark the end of the Marvel UK story, especially as its name vanished from cover corner boxes. However, the true capstone would seem to be the edict issued in 2011 by the Walt Disney Company – now proprietors of Marvel US – that the UK division could no longer originate material featuring Marvel-owned characters. Conran accepts the logic: "Panini is a third party," he says. "When I was running it, Marvel UK was a subsidiary company of the main event, so it was a different relationship... For Marvel, quality control will be very important and when somebody outside the main group commissions original material for characters in your universe then there's always the danger that there will be a difference, and you don't want there to be a difference."

Which more or less takes us back to the reprint-only era of 1972. It's a sad situation when contrasted to the achievements of Marvel UK's glory years, perhaps, but Kirby says, "At the end of the day they're still reprinting and it's still selling and it seems to be serving a market that isn't quite reached by the comic shop trade." In 2003, Panini even revived the totemic *Mighty World Of Marvel* title, dormant for two decades.

Summing up the long, twisting tale of Marvel UK, Kirby says: "All the traditional [British] comics they jostled against have gone except for *2000 AD* and *The Beano*... They've been the great survivors, really."

WORLD OF Comics

ZAO DAO

CHINA RISING

She still lives in an isolated village in south China, and her real name is so common in Chinese that she's known only by her pen-name, but the internet has made her an international phenomenon. ***Paul Gravett*** talks to Zao Dao...

As the inventors of paper and printing centuries ago, it should be no surprise that the Chinese have their own long and vibrant history of comics. The most significant are *lianhuanhua*, literally "images in chains", booklets typically in black-and-white, palm-sized, with one landscape-format image per page. But these wonders illustrated by classically trained illustrators have rarely broken through the Great Wall of China and reached the West in translation.

In the 21st century, the Great Firewall of China may want to be equally impenetrable, but the internet is making accessible a very young generation of web-savvy creators, who are finding fame worldwide. Among the most spectacularly gifted is Zao Dao, the pen-name of a young woman born in 1990. Because her real name is so common in China, she adopted the pen-name Zao Dao, which means "early rice" – a reference to July, the month of her birth, when the first rice crop is harvested. It has proved appropriate for this precociously brilliant artist, who at the age of 26 has become an internet phenomenon, while still living in the isolated village on the outskirts of Kaiping where she was born.

Drawing since she was a child, Zao Dao never took any formal classes but devoured the books on classical Chinese painting, gifts from her encouraging parents. By her early 20s, she was enrolled in an art school in Guangzhou for three years but found the course boring. Meanwhile, in 2010 she had started a blog on the Chinese social website Weibo, posting her fierce and freewheeling artworks in ink and watercolours, which drew over 150,000 followers. Her appealing approach takes the mystical and mythical past, often rooted in the Buddhism she grew up with at home, and spices them up with a modern edge and spirited, predominantly adolescent protagonists.

While China's often conventional mainstream found her maverick mash-up of styles bizarre, an independent publisher approached her in 2013 to commission her

> *"You couldn't find much to read in our isolated little village"*

first book, a wordless narrative blend of illustrations and comics entitled *The Breath Of The Wind In The Pines*. Three reprints swiftly followed, and when Mosquito Editions released a French adaptation in September 2015, with some additional explanatory texts, Zao Dao was invited to comics festivals in Grenoble and Algiers, further cementing her increasingly international following. In September 2016, she was a special guest at the Fête de la BD in Brussels, where she was the star of the festival, with long queues and admiring crowds for her live ink-and-wash drawings. Her global recognition shows no signs of slowing down.

COMIC HEROES: Can you please describe the room or space where you work and how you spend a typical day?

ZAO DAO: My life is very simple. Usually when I am working, I get up around six in the morning and go out to do some exercise. When I get back, I do a bit of cleaning of my aquarium. Then I start working on my drawings, which goes on till 11 at night, when I go to bed.

In a quieter period with not too much work, I go walking in the mountains, or play with the village dogs, or meet with friends and have a good meal together. But even so I try to draw before going to bed around 11pm.

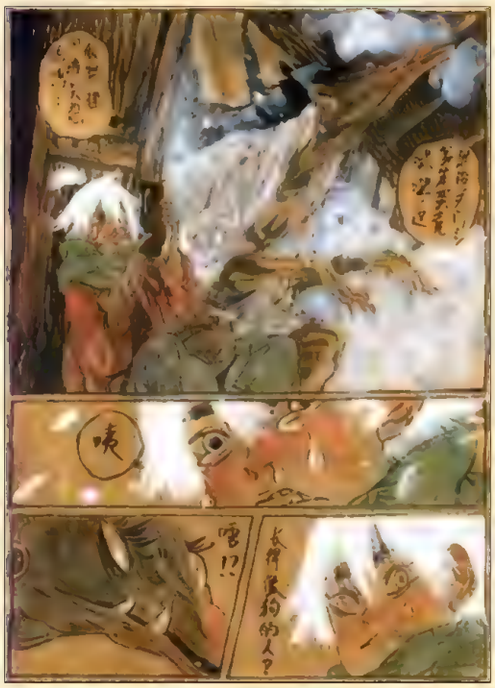
Above: In addition to Chinese mythology and traditions, Zao Dao's work clearly draws on modern inspirations..

CH: What are your preferred media – pencil, ink, watercolour, gouache? And how much do you use digital software?

ZD: I start with a sketch in pencil, then I make the outlines in ink and apply colour with watercolours. To correct differences in the colouring in the scan, I use Photoshop, but for a long time now I've not drawn on a computer.

CH: How much were you influenced by reading Chinese comics or lianhuanhua when you were young?

ZD: When I was small, you couldn't find much to read in our little village, which was isolated and almost without communication



with the outside world. There was, however, a very old library which nobody wanted to use: people said that it was haunted. It's true there were plenty of spiders' webs inside it... But I dared to go inside and read some lianhuanhua books of comics. I've forgotten their titles and stories now, but I still have the memories of the pleasure reading these books gave me...

Above: Japanese manga became a hit in the west despite the language barrier, and Zao Dao's expressive, touching work is fast winning fans outside her native China.

CH: Which stories and artists from lianhuanhua were your favourites and why?

ZD: My favourite comics series was called *The Calabash Brothers*, which was the first and only comics series I had as a child. Its story and its style – a bit like animated cartoons, and a bit like shadow theatre – were so intriguing that I still get pleasure from reading and re-reading them today.

CH: What importance do lianhuanhua have today for younger people like yourself?

ZD: The subject of what comics mean to our generation is a vast subject and I can't speak about it as if I represent my whole generation. All that I can say is that for each generation, comics influences a great number of artists. It's a shame that I couldn't read enough old books of comics, because today they can no longer be easily found. Artists of the past drew lots of characters and objects from real daily life, so they all possessed a very solid graphic foundation for their creating in the future. Their comics stories always have a close link to everyday life. I hope that young people of my generation will want to look at them again and get to know them, so they will discover the serious side of their work and will distance themselves from superficial, fashionable things.

CH: What did you like and learn from reading manga?

ZD: In Japanese comics, there are lot of different ways of telling a story – it's amazing. And on top of that, their layouts have a natural, fluid rhythm to them. Reading works like these, you always learn something, for example how to dig deeper into the subtlety of a character's personality. Among the Japanese authors, I prefer Sakaguchi Hisashi and Mizuki Shigeru.

CH: What do you admire about the artwork of Chinese artist Dai Dunbang? What are his best lianhuanhua?

ZD: I had the chance to visit the venerable Chinese artist, Mr. Dai Dunbang, who is quite an elderly person but has a very lovable and open personality. His deep knowledge of popular art and his lively realistic style come through in every line he draws with his brush. The characters in his drawings are also excellent – you can see they are the fruits of several decades of work, and that deserves our respect. Among his works, the ones I prefer are his adaptations of *Dream Of The Red Chamber* and *The Water Margin*.

CH: Please describe your first art book, and how you composed it.

When I started *The Breath Of The Wind In The Pines*, I was in a difficult phase. I had to make choices and my portfolio was almost empty. Thinking about this, I understood that a work of creativity demands total concentration. If you focus on money or other things, that blocks creativity. So I decided to concentrate totally on my creative work for two or three years, in the hope that by making this book, I would get to know my craft and its purpose. During these years, as I made progress, I had to take on small commissions, so I could then concentrate on what was for me my main work. I also travelled from province to province to avoid unhelpful disruptions. In this way I was able to make my drawings in great concentration and as I intended. I was very relieved the day I finished this story!

CH: How did you get your first book published in July 2015?

ZD: I finished *The Breath Of The Wind In The Pines* in April 2015. I remember that the Chinese publisher decided to launch its sale on the internet on the morning of my 25th birthday in July. Right away, lots of readers and friends were waiting specially for that moment. As usual, I went to bed around 11pm the night before. What surprised and touched me is, when I woke the following morning, the 4,000 copies of the first printing had all sold. So immediately, I had to see my publisher to prepare a second printing. As an amusing detail, one reader bought a bag of my pencil shavings, which my publisher and I had saved as a joke, never thinking someone would really buy them! In the end, the money from the sale of these shavings, plus the money from another signing session, was donated to an organisation which helps the education of poor local children.

Above: French publisher Mosquito has issued an artbook collection of Zao Dao's sketches with the title *Carnet Sauvage* ("Wild Notebook")

CH: How does the French version of *The Breath Of The*

Above: Zao Dao's work ranges from bright contemporary stories to darker tales steeped in myth and fantasy

***Wind In The Pines* differ from the original Chinese edition?**
ZD: The French version of this book from Mosquito is different from the Chinese above all in the format and paper. Holding it in your hands, you can feel the difference. Both of them have a feeling of their own.

CH: How do you engage with your 150,000-plus followers on social media on Weibo? What have you discovered from them?
ZD: I write to them and from time to time send notes or tell little funny stories on a blog for my fans. It's a way to thank them for their loyal support, because they are excellent readers, they know how to think about it and sometimes give me inspiration.

CH: How would you like to see comics publishing improve and expand in China?
ZD: If China could resolve the big problem of the piracy of the authors' rights, and so protect their rights and interests, the art of comics would develop more harmoniously.

CH: Can you tell me about the loose, short comics that you post online? Are these very spontaneous, even unplanned?
ZD: The drawings I put online on my website reflect and share daily life – there is no goal or precise project behind them. I make them for my own pleasure.

CH: How did your first trips outside China go, for example your visit to the FIBDA comics festival in Algiers?
ZD: Algiers is a beautiful city like cities in France. The festival there was really friendly – I really like how warm the people there were. The only small snag was my weak stomach, like an old person's, which after eating a lovely cheese salad was upset for a whole month.

CH: You've mentioned in other interviews that you are writing the scenario for a graphic novel. How is that coming along? Can you tell us anything about the characters or setting perhaps?
ZD: Yes, I'm in the process of thinking up a new story, but it's too soon to talk about the plot, much less the characters in the story. Sorry I can't tell you about it, for the moment, but I am working on it.

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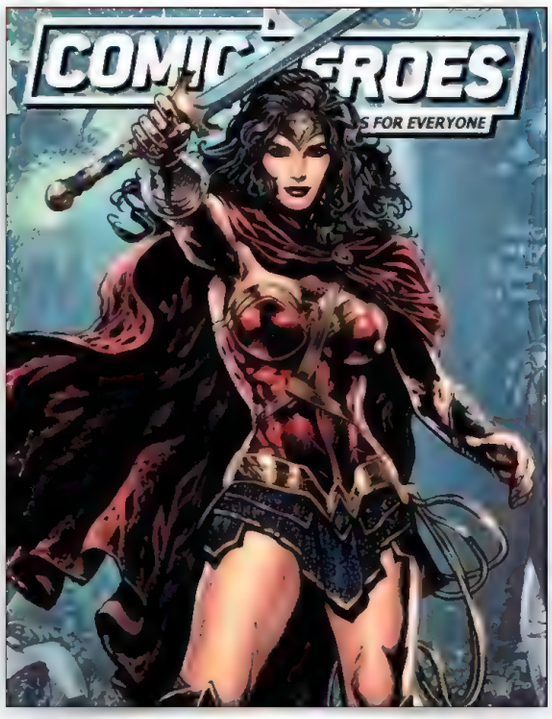

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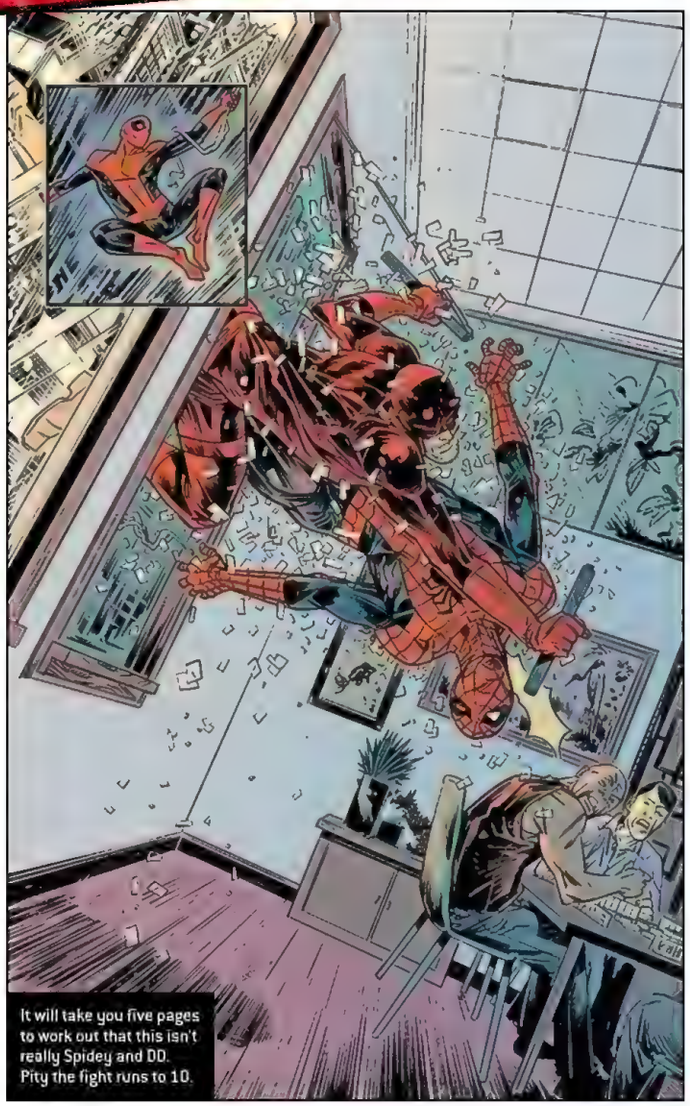


It will take you five pages to work out that this isn't really Spidey and DD. Pity the fight runs to 10.

Lots of great heist tales begin with a chance meeting...

Marvel round-up

Civil War II may be raging, but that doesn't mean all of Marvel's heroes (and villains) have downed tools. There's a number of spandex clad people beginning new adventures and arcs while Marvel readies itself for a new status quo.

One such "hero" is Deadpool, who after taking on gods, demons, the entire Marvel Universe and most of classical literature, can now add Gambit to his recent run of mini-series.

The title *Deadpool V Gambit* is something of a misnomer – although the tagline is keen to stress "the v stands for versus", the Merc with a Mouth doesn't spend much time fighting the Ragin' Cajun. Instead, what we have here is a superhero-themed heist caper as the pair do their best to avoid fisticuffs.

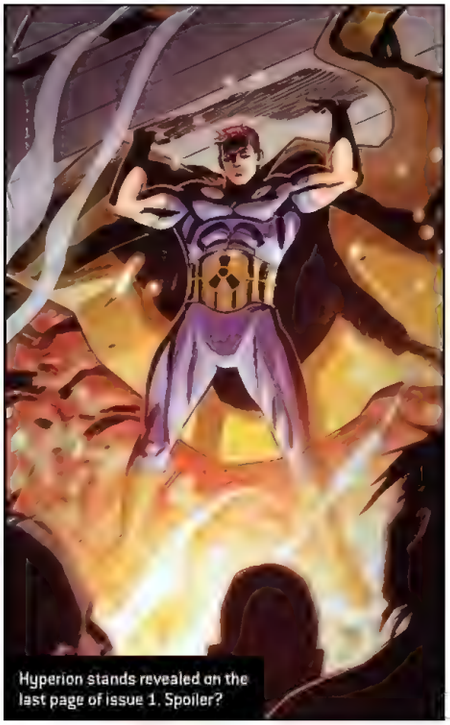
Of course, when you're Deadpool and Gambit, trying your best means, very often, failing very badly. While it takes a while to get going, *Deadpool V Gambit* turns into a heady crime/kung-fu exploitation mashup book, held together by some enjoyable Deadpool characterisation. There's even time for a swipe at the mooted Channing Tatum Gambit film. Ace.

The stakes are low but the laughs are high as Blacker and Acker (try saying that ten times fast) team up for an enjoyable, if largely throwaway book.

Uncannily familiar

Throwaway in a different manner, the opening to a new arc in *Uncanny X-Men* spends several pages doing little of merit. 11 issues in and Magneto leading a team of "by any means necessary" mutants is still to kick into gear. What should be an interesting meditation on a post-Charles, post-Scott and post-Logan future for the Children Of The Atom instead reads like a small, confined tale. All too often X-Men books feel like a dull plod as they work from event to event, and this one – which brings us an appearance from the Hellfire Club and teases a new villain – feels no different. This is a very familiar book, feeling like a poor photocopy of Rick Remender's stellar *Uncanny X-Force* run from the start of the decade. Psylocke should know better than to mess around with death cults after that run, and an alignment-flipped Sabertooth (he's now one of the good guys)

> "X-MEN BOOKS OFTEN FEEL LIKE A DULL PLOD FROM EVENT TO EVENT"



somehow manages to make hunting dinosaurs in the Savage Land dull.

High-concept, low payoff

But if *Uncanny* is throwaway, then one should avoid the new *Thunderbolts* book wholesale. The new team set-up sees a number of recently released Pleasant Hill baddies led by Bucky Barnes. For a twist the team is backed by Kobik, the physical manifestation of the Cosmic Cube, but as a four-year-old child. A team of villains in possession of one of the most powerful tools in the galaxy, led by The Winter Soldier – *The Thunderbolts* has the highest of high-concept ideas, and yet somehow conspires to be a boring and retrograde comic.

This is a team book straight from the dark days of mid '90s *Avengers*. Poor art, worse exposition and Bucky with a manbun... Not even the Cosmic Cube can save them.

That's not to say that old-fashioned storytelling cannot work, it just has to be used on the right characters and applied correctly. Chuck Wendig demonstrates with *Hyperion* that sometimes the simplest methods work best. Marvel has long had problems making its "flying brick", Superman-styled characters compelling; as The Sentry demonstrated, making someone so arch, so morally rigid and so powerful is a tough sell in the world of Marvel 616.

So in *Hyperion* Wendig has his hero lean into the world of Marvel weirdness. Pairing the Squadron Supreme hero with a teen assistant called Doll and a dog, Hyperion embarks on a great wander around the American Midwest in the vain hope that he can avoid doing the derring-do. Cheap ploy to build empathy? Possibly, but when you have someone with the powers of a god fight a twisted troupe of funfair workers, you don't need to make things too complex.

A mixed bag from Marvel, then, as more and more characters are sucked into Civil War II's orbit. Some good, some not so good. The full range of movement. The same as it ever was. **Carl Anka**

Writers: Ben Acker, Ben Blacker
Artist: Danilo Beyruth
Colourist: Cris Peter
Format: 5-issue miniseries
Reviewed: 1-4

★★★★

Writer: Cullen Bunn
Artist: Greg Land
Colourist: Nolan Woodard
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: 1-11

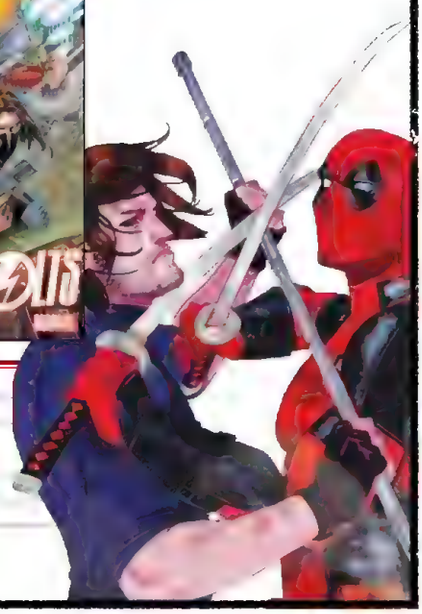
★★

Writers: Chuck Wendig
Artist: Nik Virella, Anindito
Colourist: Romulo Fajardo Jr
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: 1-5

★★★½

Writer: Jim Zub
Artist: Jon Malin
Colourist: Matt Yackey
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: 1-4

★★



Cassandra attempts to photobomb the Bat Family photo.

DC Rebirth round-up

Well, it's official, Rebirth has given DC a more powerful hit than a punch from Batman. With 12 million physical copies sold in the first three months alone, and widespread praise from audiences, DC can count the first Rebirth wave as a resounding success. DC has savvily combined the good bits of the controversial New 52 reboot with the company's rich history to create fresh takes on the old favourites.

This approach is possibly best exemplified by the big two: Superman and Batman. We reviewed the main Batman book last issue, but it's very possible the spin-off, *All-Star Batman*, is even better. Issue 1 sets up an exciting premise: Two-Face has put a price on Batman's head, to bring out the bad side of every desperate citizen of Gotham. With a fast-paced and action-packed script from the ever-reliable Scott Snyder, and beautifully rendered by John Romita Jr, this helps the book hit the ground running. We can't wait to see where they go next with a framework that has a lot of potential...

Superman soars

Until now, the modern high standard for the Man of Steel has been Grant Morrison's peerless *All-Star Superman*, which mixed quiet emotional beats with the widescreen action that the world's finest superhero deserves.

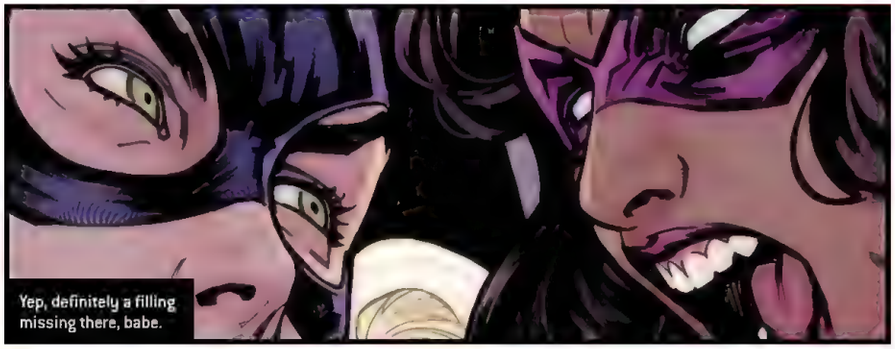
If the first issues of *Rebirth Superman* are any indication, we may have a worthy successor on our hands. Morrison's influence is clear, not least in Tomasi and Gleason's take on Jon Kent, Superman's son, struggling with his powers. It recalls their work on Damian Wayne (in *Batman & Robin*) crossed with Max Landis' recent *American Alien* mini-series.

The first issue isn't afraid to introduce emotional darkness, building to a truly terrifying Batman cameo (if looks could kill...). Issue 2 takes a soaring turn, with not even the sky limiting subsequent issues, and issue 5's moon-based Batcave setting is as astonishing as anything we've seen. Essential.

And so to Suicide Squad. While the film has divided audiences and critics (to put it mildly), the comics remain on fine form. *Suicide Squad: War Crimes* brings back original creator John Ostrander for a one-off special, which must have felt like a no-brainer idea. Like the main book, *War Crimes* features the movie team: Deadshot, Harley Quinn, Captain Boomerang, El Diablo, Rick Flag as well as a potential red shirt supervillain, Mad Dog. Also as in the movie, the character dynamics are the real sell here – with Harley and Boomerbutt... sorry, Boomerang, having the most fun exchanges.

The plot is typical Task Force X fare, with the team sent in to rescue a dodgy politician from a Euro equivalent to themselves, Strikeforce Europa. Gus Vazquez and Carlos Rodriguez' art has

> "TWO-FACE HAS PUT A PRICE ON BATMAN'S HEAD"

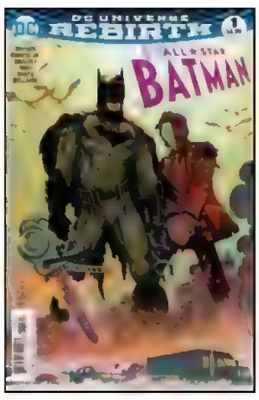


plenty of energy, but with a rushed plot producing a degree of predictability, *War Crimes* probably would have worked better as a mini-series than a special, and badness knows we want more from Ostrander on the team he created. After all, no-one writes Amanda Waller meaner than he does...

Imposters

Batgirl And The Girls Of Prey has a tougher job than other Rebirth titles. Weaving plot-lines from the DC You books (*Batgirl*, *Grayson* and *Black Canary*) to retread ground covered in the New 52 reboot (it's yet another "putting the team together" tale, albeit with the classic line-up this time) would be fine under normal circumstances, but *B&TBOP* appears to have missed the memo that Rebirth is about hope and positivity, with the book drenched in trauma and mistrust, making it the weakest title of the relaunch so far. Still, the key premise – someone else is using Barbara Gordon's Oracle monicker to do evil, so she recruits Black Canary to investigate, before Huntress decides to interfere – is interesting enough to keep us reading. Let's hope the art is less inconsistent going forward, and warmth between the main trio is quickly stoked.

Finally for this time around, we come to the grandaddy of Bat-books... *Detective Comics*. Currently on renewed form, the book features a team led by Bat-Woman, featuring Clayface as a reluctant hero, and Tim Drake as Red Robin. With a storyline packed with nifty twists and turns, this is the freshest the book has felt in ages. *Detective Comics* is one of only two titles to return to its original numbering post-Rebirth, ignoring the New 52 reboot and shrugging off a potential Rebirth #1. This first story of the new era is worthy of anything from the book's rich history. If it keeps going like this, we'll be reading happily until issue #1,000 and beyond... **Sam Ashurst**

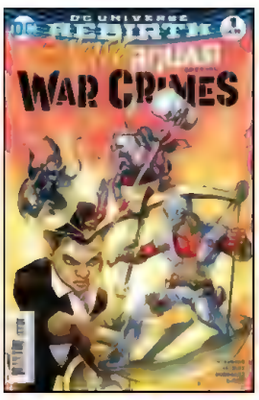


Writer: Scott Snyder
Artists: John Romita Jr, Declan Shalvey
Colourist: Danny Miki, Declan Shalvey
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★★★★

Writer: Peter Tomasi
Artist: Patrick Gleason
Colourist: Mick Gray
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: #1-5

★★★★



Writer: John Ostrander
Artist: Gus Vazquez
Colourist: Gus Vazquez
Format: One-shot

★★★

Writers: Julie Benson, Shawna Benson
Artist: Claire Roe
Colourists: Claire Roe, Allen Passalaqua
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★½

Writer: James T Tynion IV
Artists: Eddy Barrows, Alvaro Martinez
Colourist: Eber Ferreira
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: #934–936

★★★★

ONE WONDERS IT'S "GROWN, ICE, DYSTEONY" AND THEN THE HAIR. IT'S LIKE, "LET'S GIVE THESE BELLYACHES THEY JUST."
I MORE BETTER WITH A LITTLE CONSISTENCY. LORD KNOWS MY CHILDHOOD DIDN'T HAVE ANY.
DYSFUNCTIONAL HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE
BUT YA KNOW, HE WAS RIGHT ABOUT TALKING TO A GOOD LISTENER, LIKE YOU.
THANKS FOR LENDING AN EAR...
"I'D SAID YOU WON'T BE GETTIN' IT BACK."
BLAM
Great-grandad might not have approved of this gunplay.

Wynonna Earp

Writer: Beau Smith
Artists: Lora Innes, Chris Evenhuis
Colourist: Jay Fotos
Publisher: IDW Publishing
Format: 6-issue series
Reviewed: Issues 1-6

★★★☆☆

Despite a great high concept (present-day female descendant of Wyatt Earp is a US Marshal responsible for busting various supernatural criminals) Wynonna Earp isn't exactly a household name. That's possibly because she's had an epically convoluted journey to here. First published by Image in 1996 for five issues, the comic was picked up by IDW Publishing in 2003 for an even more limited run of just three issues. In 2011, IDW published a handful of collections before the property went dormant again.

The concept found its way to the desk of a brave executive at the SyFy Channel, and the subsequent TV adaptation is the reason this fourth launch has been attempted. It's a close tie-in to the show, with the live-action cast appearing on covers and in-comic panels frequently feeling like episode storyboards.

Initially, Innes' art is the weakest element, with the first two issues feeling incredibly digital. It's a real shame, because the story's actually pretty good. Wynonna is a badass from the get-go, and her mission to take down brain-dealers is well-paced, bloody and fun. The art improves dramatically in issue 3 when Evenhuis takes over, but it's CG-business as usual as Innes returns for issues 4 to 6.

Over these six instalments, Earp faces zombies, mummies, vampires and evil cowboys. She's funny and very cool. But if she really wants to triumph, she'll need to defeat one of comics' greatest foes: a jarringly loose art style. **Sam Ashurst**

Dept. H

Writer/Artist: Matt Kindt
Colourist: Sharlene Kindt
Publisher: Dark Horse
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-5

★★★☆☆

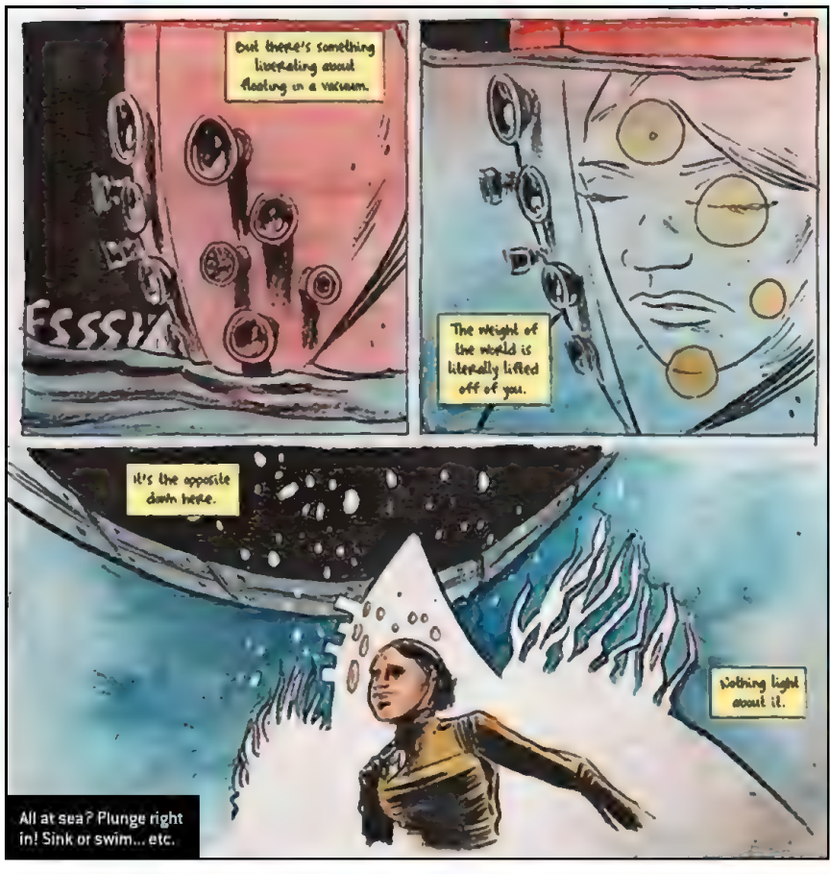
A whodunit set on a futuristic research base six miles under the sea. A compelling premise, but the concept doesn't quite translate into a gripping read.

The suspicious death of her scientist father sends Mia into the ocean depths to investigate. There are suspects aplenty on the base, including her best friend, with whom she had a falling-out; her father's crippled business partner; a surly, tattooed head of security called Q whose accent is – best guess – Scottish; and her own brother, Raj. There may well also be a saboteur at work. Naturally, the further Mia delves into the mystery, the murkier it all gets.

Each issue details the events of a single day, and towards the end of the five published so far things take a turn for the Lovecraftian. However, Mia's meandering voiceover narration is dull bordering on pretentious – lots of stuff about pressure both physical and mental. She has, too, been born with the ability to remember everything that has happened to her. This is a cue for innumerable pace-impeding flashbacks.

Meanwhile the art, like that of Kindt's breakthrough comic *Mind MGMT*, is so loose that it sometimes teeters over into slapdash. The deep dive suits the crew wear boast a lovely techno-organic design, though, and Sharlene Kindt's watercolours are nicely, subtly subdued.

Dept. H certainly has room to develop and improve, but so far the most commendable thing about it is the cunning visual-pun title. **James Lovegrove**


But there's something liberating about floating in a vacuum.
FSSSH
The weight of the world is literally lifted off of you.
It's the opposite down here.
Nothing light about it.
All at sea? Plunge right in! Sink or swim... etc.

Save the cats! And the birds – mainly by keeping the cats away from them.

"THROUGHOUT THE BOOK LITTLE BANNERS POP UP WITH STATISTICS ON CAT AND BIRD DEATH"

Angel Catbird

Writer: Margaret Atwood
Artist: Johnnie Christmas
Colourist: Tamra Bonvillain
Publisher: Dark Horse
Format: Graphic novel

★★

A great speculative fiction writer penning her first graphic novel at the age of 76? It's a truly scintillating prospect. Perhaps it's this high level of expectation that makes *Angel Catbird Vol. 1* such a disappointment.

It's a straightforward tale that quickly gets down to business. The improbably-named Strig Feleedus (a mashup of the Latin scientific names for owl and cat) is working on gene-splicing technology. A road accident and a spillage leads to Strig's DNA being spliced with that of an owl and a cat, and he finds he can transform into a part-human, part-cat, part-owl creature – the slightly less improbably-named Angel Catbird.

Strig soon finds himself in a world of other half-creatures, including his evil half-rat boss, who wants to use Strig's formula to take over the world, and his half-cat co-worker Cate Leone, who he suddenly can't resist.

In her introduction Atwood talks about her history with comic books and strips of the '40s and '50s, which she used to read religiously. The influence is plain to see, and Atwood plays up to the pulp comic genre with overly flowery dialogue and unnecessary thought-bubbles.

The art, too, nods to that era, with sparse, slightly-cartoonish panels, minimal backgrounds and exaggerated facial expressions throughout. The design of the half-creatures is good, if a little unsurprising. Johnnie Christmas and colourist Tamra Bonvillain do a good job of recreating the pulp aesthetic.

There are touches of gleefully silly humour (a part-cat/part-bat/part-human is naturally called Count Catula), but also some very predictable plotting. We kept looking for the level we were missing, but it isn't there.

Angel Catbird is published in tandem with Canadian animal charities Keep Cats Safe and Save Bird Lives, and throughout the book little banners pop up with statistics on cat and bird death, making the whole thing feel like an educational comic you'd find in a cereal box.

Given Atwood's credentials, we were expecting something more adult. But despite Cate's references to being in heat, this feels very much like a children's book, only without the smart, anarchic sensibilities of modern kids' comics. It isn't a comment on pulp fiction; it's something that could have come straight from the 1950s. **Abigail Chandler**

Misty: Gothic romance, done *2000 AD* style.

Misty

Writers: Pat Mills and Malcolm Shaw
Artists: John Armstrong and Brian Delaney
Publisher: Rebellion
Format: Collection

★★★★

***2000 AD*'s short-lived and much-missed sister title *Misty* was intended to bring the same combination of invention, action and character to girls' comics.** While it didn't take off, the title is still fondly remembered by creators and fans alike. Now, thanks to the wonders of reprints, we can see exactly why. There's lots of info on the creators here but one piece stands out: Julia Round's heartfelt tribute to the late Shirley Bellwood celebrates her extraordinary talents and sets the two tales we get here in context.

And what stories they are. The first, "Moonchild", is written by Pat Mills with art by John Armstrong. It's the story of Rosemary, a quiet, shy girl who is tormented at school by a bully called Norma and at home by her strict mother. Slowly, Rosemary realises she has a unique gift: mental abilities that will get her everything she wants but at a terrible price. Very much *Carrie* by way of *Grange Hill*, it's a great, pacey story with excellent character-driven artwork by Armstrong. As Mills discusses elsewhere, there is a sense of some punches being pulled but it's still a very strong piece.

"The Four Faces of Eve", the other story collected here, is if anything even stronger. Written by Malcolm Shaw with art by Brian Delaney, it's the story of a young girl tormented by memories that are not her own. Or are they?

Wonderfully twisty and inventive, it's vintage *Misty* – sweet-natured, action-packed but packing real punch. Much like *Misty* itself. Highly recommended, especially for *2000 AD* fans. **Alasdair Stuart**

Return Of The Honey Buzzard

Writer: Aimée de Jongh
Artist: Aimée de Jongh
Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Format: Graphic novel

★★★★

With his career as a bookseller failing and a tragic secret festering in his past, Simon Antonisse is not in a good place. Then he witnesses a stranger's suicide at a level crossing, which he could perhaps have prevented had he not been paralysed by panic and indecision.

The aftershocks from this event reverberate through Simon's life, threatening his marriage, his mental equilibrium and his future. He strikes up an unorthodox and borderline-unsavoury relationship with a bookish schoolgirl while, in flashback, it is gradually revealed why he froze at the crucial moment by the train track. The reason has its roots in his childhood, in the actions of a friend tormented by bullies.

Published originally in its creator's native Netherlands two years ago, this is a masterful piece of graphic storytelling. The narrative swoops and swerves, with its only predictable element being a somewhat hackneyed third-act twist that most readers will see coming a mile off. De Jongh's art is rough-hewn but expressively naturalistic, like a hybrid of Posy Simmonds and Katsuhiro Otomo, while her script – seamlessly translated by Michele Hutchison – is sparing in its use of dialogue, allowing her characters' facial expressions and body language, as much as their words, to convey thought and emotion. It's a story about guilt, honour and responsibility that doesn't offer pat answers or neat resolutions but does demonstrate that there is always the possibility, and the consolation, of a fresh start. **James Lovegrove**

Even the worst sins need not colour your life forever...

Dark Night: A True Batman Story

Writer: Paul Dini
Artist: Eduardo Risso
Publisher: DC Vertigo
Format: Graphic novel

★★★

Batman has many friends – Robin, Batgirl, Nightwing, the list goes on. But, in 1993, when one of his most loyal aides suffered a vicious mugging at the fists of two sadists, Batman did nothing to intervene, or even investigate. Why? Because this crime happened in the real world, not Gotham. And the victim was Paul Dini, one of Batman's key creators, the genius mind behind *Batman: The Animated Series*.

Dark Night, a brutally honest account of that period, does feature Batman, however. Thanks to Dini's vivid imagination, the character haunts the creator post-mugging, delivering hard truths about Dini's experience, and his recovery.

But Batman isn't the only character to claw through Dini's subconscious as he works through the psychological trauma of his assault. Joker, Scarecrow and Poison Ivy are key players in Dini's attempts to get his life back, a life that was spiralling long before that dark night.

Dini doesn't just detail the mugging itself. We learn that he – like so many creatives – was filled with self-loathing long before the "mistake" that cost him his confidence. We even see him wonder if he allowed himself to be victimised as punishment for previous sins. This is complex material and there's a few bum notes in the symphony (some odd racial stuff, a misjudged Batgirl moment). But this is a raw account of real trauma, designed to help fellow sufferers. Dini is Batman's pal, but if you need him he can be yours too. **Sam Ashurst**

MISTY SUTTON
"CUTEGIRL"
FASHION BLOGGER
STYLE: too cute
AGE: ???
TAP TAP
WHAT THE HELL? JUST COME IN!
Misty: hey! :)
Lottie: wtf
Misty: i have 2 go home and feed my
Lottie: omfg u do NOT have a goldfish
fish aren't even cute! this is off brand
Misty: it's not really a goldfish there's just no emoji for the type of fish it is ;3
Lottie: get in here!!!
HATERS' BRUNCH
SO.
THE ONLY HATER AT HATERS' BRUNCH...
...IS ME.
Pursuing perfection outside, fraught with insecurity and self-loathing inside.

Snotgirl

Writer: Brian Lee O'Malley
Artist: Leslie Hung
Colourist: Mickey Quinn
Publisher: Image
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★★★★

Scott Pilgrim creator Brian Lee O'Malley returns with this glimpse into the gorgeous and grotesque world of an LA-based fashion blogger and millennial internet star.

It follows the daily trials and tribulations of Lottie (Snotgirl), whose life revolves around being seen, being on-trend and looking fabulous. But Lottie has other problems, too: she's hung up on her ex-boyfriend and suspects her ex-assistant Charlene is his new love interest. She's also riddled with insecurities and hides a terrible secret – her allergies and her uncontrollable snot.

O'Malley paints a tongue-in-cheek picture of this oh-so-millennial blogger, but there's more to *Snotgirl*'s world than meets the eye and when Lottie has a night out with Caroline (alias Coolgirl), events take an unexpected twist. Her snottiness is exposed, and things turn dark.

The dialogue is snappy and youthful, encapsulating Lottie and friends' vacuous world of self-delusion. Newcomer artist Leslie Hung has created a colourful manga-like world for Snotgirl that mirrors her pop culture obsessed existence. You'll find yourself soon developing a love/hate relationship with Lottie – but just when you think you've got this story pegged, O'Malley subtly adds intriguing layers that keep things edgy and interesting.

Snotgirl is a playful, fun look at our modern society's obsession with self-branding and social media but reminds us that behind the LOLs we can't escape being human. **Claire Lim**

The Throwaways

Writer: Caitlin Kittredge
Artist: Steven Sanders
Colourist: Paul Little (Issue 3)
Publisher: Image
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-3

★★★½

Dean is a well-meaning but troubled punk. Kimiko is his hacker girlfriend. Abby is a veteran, with a hole in her mind. All three are linked to sinister forces within the US government, but none of them have a clue how much trouble they're about to find themselves in...

Caitlin Kittredge's script throws you in at the deep end, starting mid-scene before backtracking to a few hours previously. From there *The Throwaways* becomes a fresh, confident take on what initially looked like a familiar story of government conspiracies, secret agents and super-powers. The second and third issue in particular deploy some very neat reveals.

Kittredge shares the action equally between her three characters – all well drawn. Dean is a snarky part-time victim, Abby a supremely terse badass who has seen real horror and Kimiko, while the least physically imposing, is the scariest person here.

Sanders is a fine artist and his work on issues 2 and 3 has the right mix of character and scale. Deering's lettering is as impressive as always, Little's colours mesh brilliantly and the covers round off an immensely fun book that starts strong and is getting better by the issue. One for everyone from Suicide Squad and spy fiction fans to die hard Marvel readers. **Alasdair Stuart**

Animosity

Writer: Marguerite Bennett
Artist: Rafael De Latorre
Colourist: Rob Schwager
Publisher: AfterShock
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★★

***Animosity* is the story of a little girl and her dog when every animal in the world gains consciousness and the power of speech in a moment dubbed "The Wake".** Understandably, the vast majority of animals begin seeking revenge on humanity... Animosity, geddit?!

The book is being promoted as a coming-of-age road trip and a black comedy and is told on a grand scale – covering a year in its first two issues – and has definite echoes of Brian K Vaughan's *Y: The Last Man*.

It also packs in some weighty emotional wallops: memorably

a dog, about to be put down telling its owner that they're forgiven, and a cow begging for its life at an abattoir.

That said, while *Animosity* is a quick and easy read with an okay script and solid art (best deployed in the opening spreads which depict the moment of animal awakening) it's hard to shake the feeling that you're reading relatively early work from creators who will improve with time. Added to that, the miserly 20 pages of strip in each 32-page issue doesn't allow enough time for each chapter to build properly. Ultimately, the series will read better as a collected edition. **Rob Lane**

Betty & Veronica and Josie & The Pussycats

Archie Comics' New Riverdale continuity expands with two more series. *Betty & Veronica* hones in on the publisher's two female leads, mostly jettisoning the love triangle aspect and instead focussing on the budding rivalry between sweet-natured Betty Cooper and her best frenemy, Veronica Lodge. There's also a sub-plot about Pop's, the perma-troubled local hangout, being faced with closure thanks to Veronica's wicked, hyper-capitalist father.

The tone is similar to that of the main Archie book. It's warm, witty and self-aware – sometimes to a fault. The main book has covered a lot of this ground already, and Chip Zdarsky has taken the meta aspects to absurdist levels in the *Jughead* series. Simply having characters acknowledge that they're in a comic isn't so fresh anymore.

Still, Hughes art is stellar throughout and Villarrubia daubs everything in beautiful, melancholic autumnal colours.

Josie And The Pussycats, meanwhile, takes us right back to the beginning of Riverdale's biggest band. Initially just a backing group for down-on-her-luck, slightly too confident singer Josie, they eventually realise that the road to success lies in working together, rather than chasing their own dreams.

Mok's lively art and Szymanowicz's bold colours makes for a striking and appealing book. And while not all of the gags in Bennett and Deordio's script land, there's enough to ensure a healthy hit rate. It's also a little more risque than the rest of the range which helps *Josie And The Pussycats* find its place in an increasingly busy line. **Will Salmon**

BAD WORD
CENSORS
WHAT'S THIS, DEAR READERS?
OUR TITULAR HEROINES, AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS, LIKE MERE ...MERE CATS?
WHAT CAUSED THIS ATAVISTIC ANIMOSITY, BROUGHT OUR PULCHRITUDINOUS PROTAGONISTS TO SUCH DIRE STRAITS? WHAT HATH DOG WROUGHT? HANG ON MY EVERY WORD AND ALL SHALL BE REVEALED
FOR I AM J. FARNSWORTH WIGGLEBOTTOM III! HOWEVER, DUE TO MY HUMAN'S BIZARRE FOOD FETISH, I PERMIT YOU TO CALL ME... HOT DOG!
WHY CAN'T WE BE FRIENDS?

Writer: Adam Hughes
Artist: Adam Hughes
Colourist: José Villarrubia
Publisher: Archie
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★★½

Writers: Marguerite Bennett, Cameron Deordio
Artist: Audrey Mok
Colourist: Andre Szymanowicz
Publisher: Archie
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★★★

Stardust Nation

Writer: Deborah Levy
Artist: Andrzej Klimowksi
Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Format: Graphic novel

★★★★

Deborah Levy's debut graphic novel is an elusive work, rich in symbolism and questions of privilege and memory. It's the story of two men – Nick and Tom. Nick is haunted by memories of his physically abusive father and dreams of his kindly childhood tutor. He confides in his boss Tom, who rapidly realises that the memories are actually *his*. Somehow, the two have merged their consciousnesses.

Andrzej Klimowksi's art won't be to everyone's tastes, but its deliberate simplicity is central to the book. The spectre of a damaged childhood lingers throughout, and Klimowski's work elegantly reflects that. He also conjures some memorably weird imagery – in one scene an injured man is seen as a pinned butterfly, impaled but still flying. Meanwhile his portraits of the Dutch tutor, Cornelia, are charged with both eroticism and naive idealism. The lettering, however – stiff, in rigid word balloons – is less appealing.

There's a dash of low-key metaphorical science fiction at work here. The two men work at an advertising agency; their job is to infiltrate the subconscious of consumers and with Nick it happens literally. Initially baffling, *Stardust Nation* reveals itself as a surreal exploration of identity. **Will Salmon**

Saga

Writer: Brian K Vaughan
Artist: Fiona Staples
Publisher: Image
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 37

★★★

***Saga*'s 37th issue feels like a fresh start – a scene-setter for the new "War For Phang" arc.** Housed within a gorgeous Staples wraparound cover we find our family back together aboard their tree-ship, with a few friends along for the ride. When a "fuel artery" springs a leak, the crew is forced to take refuge on Phang. Meanwhile, Marco's estranged fiancée Gwendolyn and ex-slave girl Sophie discuss plans to warn Soph's remaining family of the impending crisis.

It's a decent jumping-on point, but as a standalone issue it disappoints, marking time till the story proper kicks in, perhaps. Even Staples' art is a little underwhelming. Vaughan and Staples have set the bar so high, it was perhaps inevitable that they'd fall short at some point. It won't stop us coming back for more, but issue 38 needs to hit the ground running. **Rob Lane**

ROM

Writers: Chris Ryall, Christos Gage
Artist: David Messina
Publisher: IDW
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★

For some, this will bring about paroxysms of nostalgia. For others, it will seem like a rock-bottom acquisition in a fire-sale of lapsed toy licences...

In issue 1, the spaceknight with the KITT-style LED eyes comes to Earth to fillet out his bitter enemies the Dire Wraiths, who are insidiously offing humankind. By the end of #2, he's joined forces with a PTSD-suffering war veteran and an injured police officer (both, refreshingly, women), while the GI Joe organisation – roped in as part of IDW's Revolution initiative – also line up against the nasties.

With a declamatory style, the book has a solid '80s feel but never hits the industrious everyday brilliance of original series writer Bill Mantlo. **Graham Kibble-White**

I Hate Fairyland

Writer: Skottie Young
Artists: Skottie Young, Jean-Francois Beaulieu
Publisher: Image
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-8

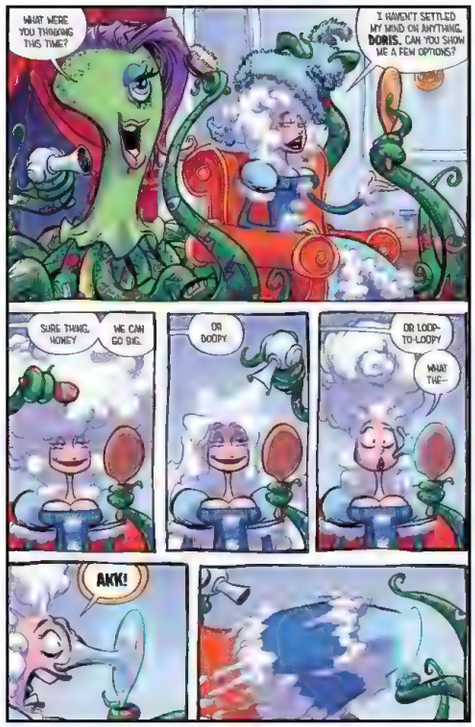
★★★

Skottie Young's antidote to the mawkishness of fairy tales has guts and brains in abundance – usually rolling down the page in an offal goo. It tells the story of Gert, who at the age of six makes a wish to be "taken away to an amazing world filled with wonder, and magic, and laughter, and joy," and promptly finds herself in the magical, sunshiney realm of Fairyland. The only way to return home? Find the key to the special door.

Cut to 27 years later and Gert is still looking. Although she remains physically a child, in every other respect she's become a misanthropic adult, given to profanity ("Well FLUFF you!") and acts of mega-violence. Accompanying her on her endless quest is a quasi Jiminy Cricket called Larrigon Wentsworth III, the closest thing she has to a friend.

Each issue sees Gert countering standard fairy tale idioms with ultimate force. Faced with a series of riddles by the Slug Lord, for example, she simply attempts to choke him to death, and devours his diminutive 'Shroom Patrol when they come to his aid.

Young's cartooning is exemplary. It has a fluid, easy style, fusing a Hanna-Barbera look with the sinuously rendered monstrosities that would squelch across the cover of a Lovecraft novel. The series can, however, be a little samey, with each instalment ending on a cliff-hanger that is all but ignored in the next issue. In #5, Young seems to address that: Gert is no longer looking to leave Fairyland, but has instead become its unwilling queen. Resuming the series after a hiatus, however, #6 sees her recommence the mission, much as before. That said, issue 8's storyline – partly presented in the form of an anime-inspired arcade game – proves Young still has some fresh ideas, so perhaps a happy ever after is still on the cards. **Graham Kibble-White**


WHAT WERE YOU THINKING THIS TIME?
I HAVEN'T SETTLED MY MIND ON ANYTHING, DORIS. CAN YOU SHOW ME A FEW OPTIONS?
SURE THING, HONEY
WE CAN GO BIG.
OR DOOPY.
OR LOOP-TO-LOOPY
WHAT THE—
AKK!

New #1s

Dr Who: The Third Doctor
Cornell and Jones take on Jon Pertwee's Time Lord in a pacy and nattily-drawn first issue.

The Forevers
Pires' and Pfeiffer's mystery weaves in black magic and fame, but it's a slightly stiff #1.

Hadrian's Wall
Intriguing new sci-fi set on a spaceship in a timeline where the Cold War took a different turn.

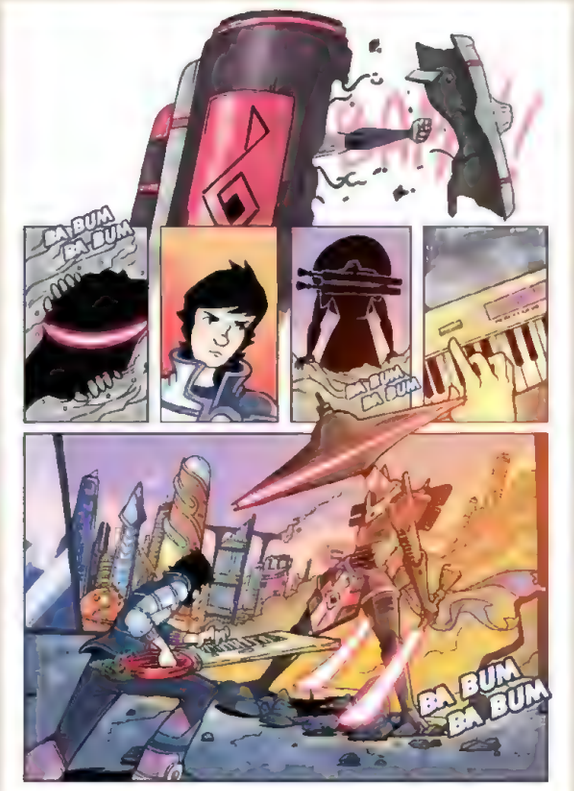
Glitterbomb
A strong start for Jim Zub's new horror comic about the perils of fame.

CREATING INDEPENDENT COMICS

Writer and editor **Mike Garley** concludes his look at how to get ahead in creating and publishing your own comics

PART FIVE:
WORLD-BUILDING AND SELF PROMOTION

Mike Garley is a writer of comics, games, screenplays and other such cool stuff. Mike wrote beActive Media's Emmy nominated comic series ***Collider***, as well as ***Wallace and Gromit***, ***Adventure Time***, ***Eponymous***, ***The Kill Screen*** and ***The Samurai Slasher***.



In this, my final chapter of Creating Independent Comics (sobs into coffee**), we're going to take a look at world-building, series bibles, and self-promotion.** Knowledge of these elements will hopefully allow you to take your comic creating skills to the next level by not only helping you to tell a more complex and coherent story, but also by giving you the tools to get your story to a larger audience.

Above: In the world of Melodia, Zach wields the legendary guitar-sword the 7STRING. As a dictator plots to plunge the world into war, a few warriors must test the mettle of their instruments against the might of a new musical technology: Drum and Bass.

WORLD-BUILDING

Your comic is your opportunity to tell whatever story you want to tell. In most cases what makes a comic really stand out from the crowd is a strong story that takes place is an exciting and engaging world that people want to read more about, as well as a cast of complex and relatable characters.

World-building is vitally important – it's the art of creating a credible setting for your story. No matter if your world is almost identical to our own or completely alien and bizarre, it is vital that it's believable enough for the reader to buy into what happens there.

I recommend that before starting your comic you make sure you fully understand the world you've created. Decide such things as: what could happen in your world? How will the general populace behave? If something strange has happened before, are there any signs of it? Does your world have a different history to our own? Lots of the answers to these types of questions will dictate the tone of your story.

World-building isn't about telling people that "weird stuff" can happen here; it's about creating a story where, if weird stuff does happen, then it feels at home and doesn't take the reader out of their engagement with the story.

For example, if your story is about the police in a small village community then you'll need to convey certain elements to the reader – how big is the village? Does everyone know everyone else? What are their relationships like? What could (believably) happen in the village?

The answers to these questions and the tone that they imply can make all the difference between your small town cop comic feeling like *Hot Fuzz* or more like *Midsomer Murders*. >

"When I start one of my major comics projects, the world it all takes place within is one of the most important parts of my creative process. Since I rarely, if ever, set my comics in reality or the world as we know it, knowing the nature of this new fictional world is not only a vital part of writing the story but also a really fun part! I love coming up with peoples, cultures, currencies, maps, traditions... everything. My stories always start with the big themes, the actual essence of what the story is and who the main characters are. But the first pieces of actual nitty-gritty work I do are always on the world." – **Nich Angell (*7String*, *Cat and Meringue*, *Big Bunch Magazine*)**

GEORGE! YOU'RE ALIVE! ARE YOU OKAY BUDDY?
CRIKEY, I DON'T HAVE A NOSE BUT YOU HUM-DING MATE!
NONE OF THAT MATTERS... IT'S TOO LATE... HE'S HERE.
WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?
OK... IS EVERYONE ELSE SEEING WHAT I'M SEEING?
NOW THAT... IS UNEXPECTED
WE'VE GOT A PROBLEM
YOU'RE TELLING ME
WE'VE LOST THE CONNECTION TO THE DEVICE
YOU WHAT?
THE CREATURE IS GIVING OUT SOME KIND OF ELECTRO-MAGNETIC PULSE, AND IT'S SCRAMBLING THE SIGNAL
YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO ACTIVATE IT YOURSELF
OH, FOR #!@%'S SAKE!
D'OH!
YOU'VE GOT TO DO IT YOURSELF.
FRAGILE

"For me, characters will always be at the forefront of any good story. You can have all the action set-pieces or creepy atmosphere you want, but if there aren't characters worth following then the narrative won't be as enjoyable. Think about your favourite films, TV shows or movies without a doubt one of the main reasons you love it so much is because there was a character, or ensemble of characters, that you could connect with." – **Vince Hunt (*Red Mask From Mars*)**

CHARACTERS AND SERIES BIBLES

In addition to a rich and well-developed world, every story needs a strong cast, and generally at least one character that the reader can relate to. That doesn't mean your characters need to be likeable, it just means that generally readers like to feel a connection with at least one character. If they don't, then they're unlikely to care about their struggles. Your cast should be diverse, engaging, and above all *characters*. They should have their own wants and needs. Make them earn their space in your comic.

Comics are obviously a visual medium – utilise this by making your characters visually diverse and interesting. Spend time working on design, clothes, armour, body type, hair colour, everything.

SERIES BIBLES

A good exercise when creating your comic is to make a series bible. A series bible is a document that includes your story breakdown, character sheets, reference material, backstory, any thoughts on possible progression, and anything else you could possibly think of. Your bible is a reference guide and a roadmap combined into one – and can be especially helpful when trying to convey the story to the rest of the creative team.

I normally update the bible as a project progresses, adding in sketches and any promo material that is created throughout the course of the comic, which allows you to easily keep track of an ever-changing project. A series bible can also come in handy if you're looking for additional material for a collected edition!

Right: This character design for Samurai Slasher was used to convey its look and aesthetic to all the artists who worked on the anthology. This was particularly handy for the second book, where the Samurai's armour is separated. It allowed multiple artists to work on the same story at the same time and maintain a level of consistency.

"Even though my book has a central titular hero, it's actually a team story. It was hugely important to me that everyone in it had their own voice. Not only does it lend more weight to the story but it makes the writing process even more fun. Plus they can take on a life of their own and evolve along with the story itself, maybe even get their own spin-off stories in the future."

– **Vince Hunt (*Red Mask From Mars*)**

PROMOTING YOUR COMIC

Above: Joe Glass, the creator of *The Pride*, utilises Tumblr and Facebook to connect with – and to help grow – the audience for his book. Joe regularly posts updates, sneak peeks and promo art, all of which helped his comic become one of the most successful on ComiXology Submit in 2015.

Good promotion can make or break a comic, and unfortunately as an independent creator the job of publicising your comic falls squarely on your shoulders. This is just one of the many full-time jobs you'll need to do in service to your comic. I'm sorry.

There's lots of ways to reach a larger audience, but arguably the best (apart from personal recommendations) is by having your comic featured and reviewed on a comic site. Most sites will have details on how you can contact them, but if not then you'll find the majority are active on their social media. Do your homework before approaching them to make sure that your work suits them – if your book has a mainstream feel then find a reviewer who likes to review mainstream-style comics; if your comic is full of weird body horror then look for people who will be receptive to that style of comic. And don't feel obliged to stick to comic reviewers – look for sites that you think will appeal to the type of people that will enjoy your comic. The worst thing that can happen, from you politely asking if they would like to take a look at your comic, is that they can say no. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Establishing a good working relationship with a site will be a massive help for your current (and future) projects.

Away from reviewers, there's a plethora of platforms you can use to promote your comic – Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and so on. You don't need to use them all. Find what works for you and stick with it. But don't be afraid to try new things too.

"Some sites will work better than others. Tumblr, for example, is a fantastic way of making simple posts that can advertise your work, promote your important links, or provide 'progress reports' or breakdowns that people may find interesting and draw them in. With Tumblr, and all social media, you need to learn and understand how hashtags work, work out the times of day when your posts seem most popular and work towards always uploading something at these times."

– **Joe Glass (*The Pride*)**

BE YOURSELF

Ugh. Just writing that title made me feel like I'm writing for some self-improvement blog... However, it is without doubt one of the most important things that you need to do when creating an independent comic. Your comic needs to represent you and be a story that only you can tell.

Anyone can tell a story about a pirate, but if you're telling one then it needs to be one that only you can tell. It needs to come from your thoughts, ideas, ideals, and life experience. This is how you make your story unique – you tell it from a point of view that only one person in the entire world can have. This is, in essence, what the saying "write what you know" means. It means that you should use your personal knowledge and experience to craft your story. It does not mean your characters can only do and say things that you do; otherwise all my comics would be about a guy who tries to write while his children bully him. Seriously, they're really mean.

Similarly, when you're looking to promote and sell your comic remember to be personal and put yourself across well. The independent scene is about individuals telling the stories they're passionate about.

Above: *Cat and Meringue* – a feline and a pudding adventure across many different oceans in their twin-hulled boat. It's daft and nonsensical with a lot of silliness and puns along the way.

The success of any independent creator is down to the passion and drive of the creative team to tell the stories that they want to tell. Don't be afraid to take risks or do things that are different. Making comics is all about making comics. You'll make mistakes along the way, but without those mistakes you won't be able to learn and improve. But without doubt the biggest mistake that anyone can make is not trying.

So putting it simply, this feature is finished. Now go and make your comic, and don't let anything get in your way. Good luck! We're all counting on you.

Mike Garley

STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

Miles Hamer picks out some of the best self-published comics right now. If you have created a comic, in print or online, we'd love to hear from you! Get in touch at ***stateofindependents@gmail.com***

THE CLAWS

Story, Colouring & Lettering by Rich Carrington
Art by J.C. Grande
theguyscomic.com

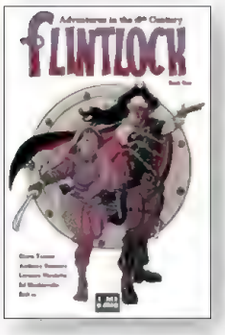
What happens when the bad guys win? Find out in this ambitious new title from writer Rich Carrington's own Hardline Comics stable. Following hot on the heels of his similarly irreverent *The Guys*, *The Claws* follows a merry band of super-powered sociopaths carving up a defeated city between them. Thanks to an uneasy criminal alliance of crazies, racists and power-mad lunatics, each controlling their own crime-riddled district, New Olympus sure ain't no Littlehampton. With a range of baddies from a lightning-bolt-wielding

mullet-sporting redneck to a mutant who can ooze addictive psychotropic drugs, *The Claws* is knuckle deep in nefarious bombast, with a hint of Gotham's finest at its core.

Carrington explains: "I've always found the villains to be much more interesting than the good guy. When I was a kid, I always had Skeletor drag He-Man around by that stupid blonde bob of his, and I was always a bit disappointed when the bad guys didn't just go to town on Superman with Kryptonite knuckle dusters." Find out how far that logic goes!

FLINTLOCK

Story by Steve Tanner
Art by Anthony Summey, Lorenzo Nicoletta, & Ed Machiavello
Lettering by Bolt-01
timebombcomics.com



Ye olde thrills abound in writer Steve Tanner's gunpowder-fuelled title with a trio of tales that starts with a rollicking robbery by 18th-Century Dandy Highwaymen. Or should that be women? As Tanner explains, "None of *Flintlock*'s leads are what you may expect. Both our lead highwayman and pirate characters – Lady Flintlock and Shanti the Pirate Queen – are women, and presented as realistic, rounded characters rather than the overly sexualised female characters we usually see in comics."

Featuring bullets, bloodletting, and the unlikely but awesome adventures of the Clockwork Cavalier (why limit steampunk to the 1800s?), *Flintlock* is for those who like their swashbuckling super-charged and packing a punch.

COMICHAUS – THE NEW INDIE BRITISH MONTHLY

Compiled by Pete Genepool & James McCulloch
comichaus.com

From the self-published creator platform comes a new self-titled monthly anthology series, representing the very best the British indie scene has to offer. A blistering collection of ongoing stories spanning horror, sci-fi, western and more, it boasts a wealth of imagination and an astonishing array of talent. It's mostly a succession of tantalising story slices, a confident comic that can tease a series of cliffhangers per issue, but Comichaus' boldness pays off by the bucket-load. So, if you're after an assortment of adventures that include a girl in peril, a badass in purgatory, and subversive monster fantasy, grab this sample of Britain's best and brightest now.

CHARGE

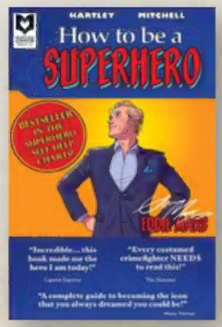
Story by Dan Jury & Chris Jury
Art by Adhitya Zulkarnaen
Colouring by Pamela Siega
Lettering by Michael Lagace
charge.raybixon.com

A time-straddling political thriller with bite, *Charge* is a five-part graphic novel sci-fi yarn as rich in suspense and intrigue as in understated Canuck humour. The brainchild of siblings Dan and Chris Jury, the story is set initially in 1975 at a remote, snowy research facility straight out John Carpenter's *The Thing*. The depleted team of Comtech accidentally-on-purpose set off a chain of cataclysmic events that threaten the very fabric of the space-time continuum. But hell, they do it so beautifully, courtesy of Zulkarnaen's crisp art, you'll have already forgiven them by the end of the first chapter. Facing down a military unit from the future, they have a tangled time fight on their hands if they want to survive...

A period piece with a determinedly grim location, *Charge* has a solid heart of humanity beating resolutely beneath the '70s cynicism.

HOW TO BE A SUPERHERO

Story by Ned Hartley
Art by Gavin Mitchell
heartlesscomics.com



Eddie Mars claims to know what it takes to be a caped crimefighter, and for only $200 per session he'll spill the superhero beans in one of his exclusive evening classes for wannabe avengers. As you may have guessed, *How To Be A Superhero* isn't about your average crusader hiding behind a domino mask. Ned Hartley – editor of *Clint, Wallace & Gromit Comic* and *Horrible Histories*, and the man behind the brilliantly disrespectful *Punchface* – scripts a vivaciously buoyant deconstruction of the superhero genre, light on its feet and hilarious in execution.

Gavin Mitchell's art brilliantly sells the plot's effervescence: it's bold, bright, and damn near bursting from the panels. As we follow the story of small-time conman Mars and the chaotic unravelling of his superhero scam, *How To Be A Superhero* is an affectionate genre parody clearly made with a playful relish that generates chuckles from every page. Sign up to his classes as soon as you can!

THE STORMCHASERS

Story by JayDee Rosario **Art by** Russ Leach
Colouring by Michael Summers
unstoppablecomics.com

Sexy, muscular, bone-crunching fun, JayDee Rosario's *The Stormchasers* is a joyous and unabashed superhero team-up with more than a hint of *Justice League* and a hefty, tasty dollop of Marvel thrown into the mix. From Rosario's self-built publishing house, Unstoppable Comics, the adrenalised adventures are their focal point for a wider universe that's branched out into separate titles such as *Interceptor* and *Dragonstorm*. The New York based production is an ambitious endeavour that kicks ass and stands shoulder-to-cowl with the absolute best of them. Seek them out!

MY LIFE IN COMICS

TULA LOTAY

ARTIST OF *SUPREME: BLUE ROSE*

THE FIRST COMIC I EVER READ

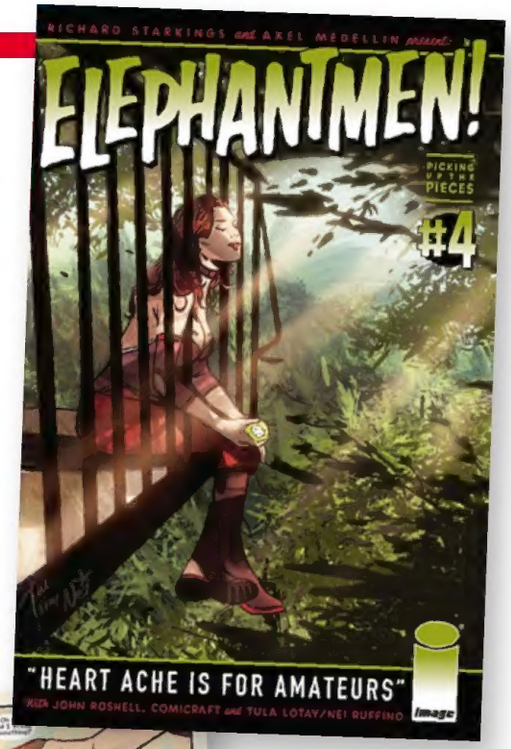
A *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* Annual by Archie Goodwin and Al Williamson. I used to pick up the Marvel UK *Star Wars* every week, and I especially loved the Marvel movie adaptations in the back like *Blade Runner*, Bill Sienkiewicz's *Dune* and *Time Bandits*. But like for most kids born in the '70s, *Star Wars* was everything, and getting to see my favourite characters in comics was the best.

THE FIRST INFLUENCE ON MY WORK

I started reading comics around the age of seven. I used to go to Batley Market with my Dad, where there was a stall that sold seconds, newsagents' [returns] that should have been pulped, so you could get five for 20p. I always got *X-Men, Daredevil, Judge Anderson, Power Pack, Star Wars*. I could never get a full run. I'd always just have bits of stories. But I still loved them so much!

MY FIRST PROFESSIONAL COMICS WORK

Elephantmen #54 by Richard Starkings. I'd known Rich for a while and he asked me to draw part of an issue. At the time I thought he was just being kind, but since then I found out it was because he really likes my work! I was terrible with my confidence early on, and that's maybe why I came into the business quite late. The *Elephantmen* issue was just before I got my first Vertigo gig on *The Witching Hour*. I'd gotten an Instagram account and started posting all my sketches. Editor Will Dennis saw my work and offered me that job, and it hasn't slowed down since. I've been very lucky.



MY FAVOURITE COMIC OF ALL TIME

If I had to pick one it would be *Domo* by Katsuhiro Otomo. I really loved DC's Vertigo imprint when it first came out, and I remember all the excitement around it. It was such a new idea and I was just the right age to appreciate those titles like *Preacher* and *Shade, The Changing Man*. I'm really excited about the new Young Animal line. I've read a few of the first issues, and it really took me back to those early Vertigo days.

THE BEST COMIC I'VE WORKED ON

I absolutely adored working with Warren Ellis on *Supreme: Blue Rose* for Image. It's the only full comic I've drawn on my own so far, and having that freedom was really exciting. Warren and I are working on a new book now called *Heartless*. It's the best work I've done yet and Warren's story is amazing!

THE CHARACTER I'D MOST LIKE TO WRITE

My favourite characters of all time are Daredevil and Elektra, and Batman. I'm drawing Batman and Poison Ivy in the Fall for *All-Star Batman* with Scott Snyder, so that!

THE COMICS I'M CURRENTLY READING

I need to catch up on a lot of books, but I just read the first issue of *Shade, The Changing Girl*, and that blew me away!

Tula Lotay has drawn a variant cover for Shade, The Changing Girl #1, out now.

Above: Tula Lotay's art on *Supreme: Blue Rose* combines beautiful figure work with eye-catching digital inks, giving everything a dreamy feel.

CRIME SCENE

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